



THE DEAD STAY YOUNG



By the Same Author

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The Dead Stay Young

by ANNA SEGHERS

EYRE & SPOTTISWOODE
London

Part One

One

I

'MACHT SCHLUSS! Let him have it!

The Hauptmann muttered the words under his breath, but Erwin heard them. This, he realized, was the end. Even yesterday, when the White Guards stormed the Royal Stables, it had not occurred to him that he might be killed. True, he had learned to reckon with death – ever since 1914 when, a half-grown boy, he enlisted in the army, which at that time offered more of a future than his own forlorn and orphaned youth. Better a soldier's uniform than the wretched uniform of the Berlin Sanitation Department – that disgusting job his uncle had procured for him because he was tired of feeding him and unwilling to put up money for a teacher's position.

'Schluss! Schluss!' The words echoed and re-echoed from ~~dean~~ within him – or did they come from between ~~the~~ Hauptmann's clenched teeth?

In the beginning the army had meant everything to him – mother, home, protection. He embraced the words 'Honour and Fatherland' as readily as the profession of arms, for suddenly he, the poor little urchin who had been merely tolerated or beaten or neglected, saw a great future opening out before him. In the trenches, after the first waves of physical fear, the threat of death became as natural to him as it is to every human being who knows, theoretically, that he must die, but cannot visualize his own death. Erwin's real life, however, began in December, 1916. That was when the first leaflets in the trenches fell into his hands. Since then, not quite three years had passed when the words '*Macht Schluss*' marked his end.

The brake squeaked and, as if it were a signal, he felt a surge of mad hope within him. Absurd to hope now! He tried in vain to put it from his thoughts. Ever since he had seen that leaflet, death had come to have a new meaning for him, as if it were more concerned with living than with dying. Before that, life had been a burden to him, with now and then a bit of fun on certain Sunday nights. That leaflet was the first human appeal to him personally. For the first time in his life he felt that someone was reaching out to him eagerly; someone who needed him badly, at this moment, with all his heart

and soul; someone who could not live without him. In the old days he had flattered himself that the Fatherland needed him; he grimly refused to admit that he had been misled by his own desire. For some time half of his heart waged war against the other half – though he already suspected that the army had no more to do with home and mother than his aunt, and she was obviously glad to be rid of him. The much-lauded Fatherland had by no means proved to be the sanctuary he expected.

From the moment he tucked the leaflet away in his tunic, he knew that at last he had found the thing he had been seeking instinctively, restlessly. Questions that had drifted like shadowy forms through his mind now stood out clearly in black and white. Why had life been as it was before the war? Why had it not been different? Why had there been a war? Why ought it to end?

The Hauptmann, who had just muttered '*Macht Schluss!*' now growled audibly: 'Look snappy.'

The guard had not let go of Erwin since they shoved him into the car. Now he tightened his grip on his arm. How many minutes more did he have? Each minute ticked by as slowly as a year. The last two, the real years of his life, flashed by as swiftly as minutes. The man who had given him the leaflet was named Martin. Erwin had no conception of the endless preparation that had been necessary before that leaflet could go to print: false passports, dangerous trips abroad, conferences in Sweden and in Switzerland, hard-headed disputes, secret presses, arrests at the front and at home, guardhouse and court martial . . . till at last those few printed lines appeared before his eyes. Because the leaflet instructed him to 'Pass this along', he quickly and obediently passed it on to others.

Not long after that he was given the job of distributing new leaflets. He began to talk with his comrades and, little by little, to take part in their conferences. He went through a sort of schooling, between battles, in the trenches. On a wet and stormy November night the wind from the East swept the leaves from Red October to a tired and hungry Germany now facing its third war winter. The revolution was as young as himself.

My friend, thought Erwin, must have been worried because I did not keep our appointment. He thought of Martin in the past tense as if they had both lived long ago in some bygone day. Perhaps Martin was still there, at the appointed place, waiting for him . . .

Both young men had come to Berlin exactly three months before. Neither of them had any family: no mother waited for them, no sister, no sweetheart – nobody but the revolution. By revolution

they did not mean merely a change of government, the Soviet system or 'All Power to the Soviets!' They meant the New Life that had as little in common with the past as this world has with the Beyond. They no more expected to see the earth parcelled out among men than they looked for vast upheavals within the bowels of the earth. For himself in the new life Erwin looked forward to getting a job as an engine-fitter or perhaps even as a draughtsman just as he looked forward to a new world governed freely and justly by an inexhaustible Power. For this they had fought for weeks in the streets of Berlin; finally the White Guards had been called out. And in November the Republic had been born, like the child in the fairy tale; an old man with white hair, bowed down under the burdens and mistakes of the past. If now he, Erwin, should have to die, he felt that his death would be no more than a passing incident in life as a whole which would go rushing on with or without him. Not till the Guards stormed the Royal Stables, occupied the nearby streets and rounded up the prisoners, had he realized that only a certain portion of that universal life which was constantly renewing itself was his - an allotted share of living and dying. But when they shoved him into the automobile to take him to Headquarters at Nowawes for questioning, he yielded to the foolish throng of hopes that swept over him just like any man concerned with his own fate. As they drove through the woods behind Wannsee, he toyed with the wild fancy that his comrades might have rallied and recaptured the Stables, that they might surround Headquarters to which he was now being driven, break up the trial - or even rescue him on the way there.

Between Wannsee and Nowawes they passed Hauptmann von Klemm's car, standing on the side of the road with a flat tyre. Klemm was an officer in the Guards Regiment that had stormed the Royal Stables, as were also the two lieutenants seated to right and to left of him. Klemm asked where the prisoner was being taken and ordered the driver of the prisoner's car to change cars with his own chauffeur.

Erwin listened tensely to the instructions. The tyres on the Hauptmann's car were to be pumped up and the car driven back to the Furstenberger Hof. Klemm's chauffeur would take over the prisoner's car. They were all going to Headquarters at Nowawes anyway.

Erwin wished he could get a look at the two men sitting behind him on either side of Hauptmann Klemm. He could not turn his head, not only because it would have been against regulations, but

because it felt as heavy as lead. He glanced sideways at the new chauffeur, at his round, close-cropped head, and the chin that jutted out beyond his nose. It was the last strange chin in Erwin's life. He could not quite catch Klemm's words now, but there was no mistaking the tone: no use bothering with a lot of red tape. Might as well get it over at once.

They probably would not shoot him in the car, Erwin guessed. Any moment now they would order the chauffeur to stop. Then they would make him get out. To save themselves any unpleasantness they would take him off a short distance and shoot him. Erwin pulled himself together and summoned all his will-power; deliberately he cast off the useless ballast of foolish hopes and vain memories all men carry with them: Martin, his friend and brother on earth, who was perhaps thinking of him this very moment – useless ballast. Let him go! The girl with whom he had spent the last three Sunday nights – more useless ballast. Let her go too! Now at last he was free. He could hold himself up straight: he could stand erect before those men as if he were facing the entire nation. This was the end. Soon he would be through with life. Life would be through with him. Those birches, those pines, those clouds would all still be there, the great city beyond the woods, and those five men who were about to put an end to him. They would drive on in his stead. They would drive back to the city, past the place where he was to have met Martin. They would carry the news of his death.

He heard the brake go on and felt the car slow down.

'Better get out!' the chauffeur muttered.

The guard grabbed Erwin under the arm, at the same time shoving his knee behind the young man's so violently that they almost fell out on top of each other. Then the guard was pushing him straight across the road into a sunny stretch of pine woods. For the last time the words echoed in Erwin's head: '*Macht Schluss! Let him have it!*' Behind him he heard the three officers laughing as they slid along on the slippery pine needles as if they were on skis. Now I'll get a good look at them, he thought. He stopped so suddenly that he almost knocked the guard down. Then he turned and looked straight at the three officers. But he could not see their faces clearly, because for him the light of the world was already dim. He shouted – or thought he shouted, for his voice was weak:

'You can finish me off now, but your turn will come too.'

At a sign from the Hauptmann, the younger of the two lieutenants raised his revolver and fired.

Erwin fell, the bullet piercing his head.

The guard said: 'He almost gave me the slip.'

The Hauptmann said: 'Cover him up! Be quick about it!'

Someone called to the chauffeur and he jumped out of the car where he had been waiting alone. They carried the dead man to a shady spot between two sand dunes. There they dug a grave around him and filled it in with sand and pine needles, for the earth here was not good. The chauffeur ran back to the road and brought a couple of stones to weight it down.

The three officers got back into the car, Klemm sitting between Wenzlow and Lieven as before. Wenzlow was the officer who had fired the shot. The muscles over his cheekbones still twitched slightly. His boyish, thin-skinned face was long like his nose and his hands and all his bones. He had shot so many, many men since he had left the Cadet School and joined the army at the front. It never occurred to him that there might be anything unusual about this last shot he had been ordered to fire, here in his homeland, on his own soil, at a solitary man who belonged to the same soil – nor did he give it a moment's thought. But the muscles still twitched slightly under the thin, too tightly-stretched skin. Lieven, motionless on Klemm's right, stared rigidly back in the direction of the grave.

'Look over there, Herr Hauptmann!' he said. 'Those two birches among the pines. Like snowflakes in the sun. At home on the Baltic we have whole forests of them.'

Klemm said to his chauffeur:

'Ten minutes to eleven, Becker. We'll still be in time for the meeting.'

They drove past a few straggling houses on either side of the road, neat and clean in their bare, wintry but well-kept gardens. Klemm was anxious to get the journey over. Perhaps he could go home soon. He could then see the little son who had recently been born to him. Perhaps he would take his friend, Lieven, with him or his brother-in-law, Wenzlow, or both – or better still, neither of them. Becker would drive him down, of course – Becker, first his orderly, then his chauffeur, had been with him ever since the beginning of the war.

Marie pulled the sheets off the bed. Luisa looked over at her from the washstand where she was combing her hair.

'We made the beds up fresh not quite a week ago,' she protested.

Marie did not reply. She rolled the soiled bed-linen together and stuffed it into a bag that hung, for that purpose, on a nail on the bedpost. Luisa stared critically at her hair in the mirror, first one

side, then the other. Then she examined her make-up carefully.

'Pahaw!' she exclaimed. 'It won't be the first time in his life your Erwin has seen such things! A few bloodstains! What's that? If you're so bent and determined on being extravagant you can just wash 'em out yourself!'

In her narrow skirt, with her thin, bare arms and the plait, not so thick as it used to be, hanging down her back, Marie looked like a little schoolgirl. And like a schoolgirl she said:

'I'll wash out everything with my own soap the first thing tomorrow morning before I go to work. If it's sunny tomorrow the sheets will be ready for me to iron by evening.'

Luisa carefully adjusted her felt hat with the velvet ribbon and looked at herself in the mirror. Then she pirouetted gaily to the door:

'Well, I'm going to be a nice girl and leave you two alone. Doesn't your boy-friend ever take you out to have a little fun?'

'What for? It's quiet here. You couldn't find anything as nice as this anywhere.'

'Oh! That's what you always think with the first one – that you've found something special. Well! Give him my best, dearie! See you later!'

Marie hurried into the striped dress she saved for Sundays. It was a thin summer dress and she shivered with cold. Then she combed and brushed her hair and twisted her plait into a knot at the base of her neck – all without so much as a glance in the mirror. To Marie, if a girl's clothes were neatly washed and pressed she was properly dressed. For the same reason the room, which was very clean and very bare, looked all right to her.

A few sticks of wood lay ready in the pot-bellied iron stove. Erwin would put a match to them when he came and laid the briquette on top. She spread the cotton cover over the bed she shared with Luisa. Only a few more things to pick up – the pincushion, the soap tray, all Luisa's possessions. Also a couple of photographs and one or two picture post cards. Marie had never known anyone to send her post cards.

The two girls were waitresses in the same restaurant, the 'Anchor'. Luisa had lived for two years in this room which she rented from the woman who had given Marie a job at her aunt's request. Night after night, exhausted, too tired to go out, Marie climbed the stairs to her bedroom. She forwarded her pay and her small tips regularly to her mother in Pellwurm. And she showed no more surprise at the quarrelling and hair-pulling, at Luisa's love affairs and the

landlady's flirtations, than if they had been so many fleeting dreams.

Marie leaned far out of the window, though she knew she could not see the street down below. She gazed out over roofs and trees. The little town snuggled close to Berlin like a dingy suburb. The level stretch of countryside, with its bare, neatly ploughed fields and hazy woodlands, with here and there shimmering lakes that looked as if they had dropped down from the evening sky, was as flat and still as the sea. Marie thought she could almost have made out her island home if her eyes had been sharp enough. She could have picked out the steamer and all the cattle on the dyke, the very bricks and the faces of certain neighbours, and children on their way to school. In one of the narrow streets below, a solitary light shone out. Marie closed her eyes. She never knew what time it was till the street lights came on. Luisa had a watch.

She shut the window; but that did not make the room any warmer. Then she went out into the hall and stood listening. Her friend would be coming up the stairs any moment now. She was worried and at the same time happy. The sky was still fairly bright. But down in the street a number of lights were already burning. Surely he must be here in a minute or two! Had he not promised faithfully to come again? Three times he had said he would come and three times he had kept his promise. There was a radiance in the evening sky and on Marie's face and on her hair. Down below, the house door slammed and feet came tramping up the stairs. She listened, leaning forward eagerly. But the feet stopped at the second floor. Again the front door opened and shut. This time the steps did not stop on the second floor: they kept on coming up and up . . . Now they were quite near . . . Marie turned pale with excitement! But the steps stopped at the next door. She heard a burst of laughter and hand-clapping . . .

It was dark in the room now. Down below in the street all the lights were on, and up above in the sky the stars were shining. For the first time the thought came to her that Erwin might have been detained. For the first time she was aware of the room in which she waited alone. It was a bare little room. The few objects on the dresser were neither useful nor did they add to its beauty. The wreaths of flowers in the carpet were certainly no meadow. Marie thought of her lover, not as he might look if he should come now, but as he looked the last time she saw him.

One day she had been helping Luisa serve beer and smoked meat at the 'Anchor'. It was the Christmas season and the scraggly tree, glittering with tinsel, already stood in its place in the corner. The

door opened and two young men came in. One was young and tall and thin and blond. The other was young too, but Marie did not notice his age. She noticed his eyebrows that almost met in the middle. He was not tall and thin, but short and thickset. And when he took off his cap his close-cropped head was as round as a bullet. His fair hair hung in lanky strands from his parting. Marie brushed the spills off the table under the Christmas tree and the two young men sat down. The short, thickset young man took her by the arm – which was just what she had hoped he would do. A few minutes later he asked whether she lived here, just as if he guessed that she wanted him to ask her that. And, as if her desire held him at the table, he sat on, talking with his friend, long after the other customers and even Luisa had left. When the 'Anchor' closed for the night, he let his friend go away without him.

The girl and the young man walked around in the rain a long time. Marie did not feel as if they were meeting for the first time – rather as if they were seeing each other again after a long separation. He had gone upstairs to her room. Luisa was still awake. Before Marie could ask her, she cheerfully offered to give up her bed and went off to spend the night in the Sperbergasse with her friend, the tramcar conductor. The next morning, when she came back to change her clothes for work, she asked: 'Well, how did things go?'

Marie did not know just what Luisa meant by that. No one but Luisa could be so stupid as to compare last night to those occasions when Luisa dressed herself in her best and put on her pink blouse. The miracle that had happened to her, Marie, was a world apart from those tawdry affairs the girls in the house often laughed and quarrelled and gossiped about. Marie said: 'He is coming back on Wednesday.'

'Let's hope he doesn't forget,' Luisa replied, a remark which seemed to Marie not ugly and spiteful but merely foolish.

He came back Wednesday at the appointed hour. And again Luisa good-naturedly vacated room and bed. The following Saturday he was there again, and he stayed in the room all day Sunday till Marie came upstairs after work. Last week, too, for the third time, he appeared on the dot – not at the 'Anchor' either, but straight up here. That time he had not smiled with his lips, but the smile in his eyes had been enough to light up not only his thin face but the whole room and the patch of evening sky in the window. And it seemed as if tiny sparks from his eyes flew around over her and over the bed and the chest of drawers.

Marie walked over to the window, but turned away at once as if the early white frost flowers on the window-pane were an impenetrable thicket. Someone switched off the gramophone that had been playing continuously downstairs in the restaurant. The silence of the night was more painful to Marie's ears than the noise. Now and then an idle thought drifted through her mind, but her heart was empty and desolate. Perhaps something really important had kept him from coming: for example, the job he was looking for. When he held her in his arms again everything would be all right. She realized now what a lot of chaos and confusion there was in the world. There had been peace as long as they were in each other's arms. Only now did she perceive that she was the one who was confused and bewildered.

The patch of sky in the window was now so pale she could scarcely see the stars twinkle. The first rooster crowed in the yard. Marie heard the whistle of the city railway. She had ridden on it once when her Tante Emilie brought her here to find a room for her. She might ride back into town again. The family would be angry. Besides, she had no money for the trip. What difference did it make where one was, after all? Her heart would no longer fall out of her breast on the journey even if it did feel as heavy as a stone.

The day was chill and damp. Her teeth chattered. She took off her Sunday dress and put on a work dress. Luisa came running up the stairs, two at a time. Her hat was askew and her pink blouse, in fact her whole person, looked dishevelled.

'Gone already?'

'He didn't come.'

'Pooh! Don't take it to heart!' Luisa began pulling off her clothes. 'My grandmother always said the only difference is the trousers. What's inside is all the same.'

II

Martin wondered whether he should tell the girl about Erwin. He, Martin, had been with Erwin in the trenches; he had been the one to give him the leaflet. Moreover, he had fought by his side that last night. But Martin had managed to get away. He knew Erwin too well not to realize that this girl he had found meant more to him than just a place where he could hide from the police. The fact that Erwin had suddenly stopped confiding in him, his best friend, was proof enough that he was in love with her. Whenever Martin tried to get him to go out with other girls, Erwin would always

shake his head and laugh: 'Not interested!' Martin noticed, however, that Erwin knew exactly what he wanted.

When his friend failed to meet him at the designated place, Martin had thought at first that he was hiding out again in the girl's room. But as time passed and still Erwin did not show up, Martin began to make inquiries. In that way he got wind of a rumour that Erwin had been arrested and taken away. One evening in the bar 'The Jolly Corner' he almost got the true story. The charwoman at the 'Corner', a decent soul, had overheard a driver gossiping with a friend. Martin tried again and again to get in touch with the driver, but it was the charwoman, through her cousin, the wife of the barman, who finally brought him the information a little at a time. The driver never got as far as Nowawes. On the way he overtook an officer's car with a flat tyre. The officers commandeered his car, prisoner and guard included, and drove off leaving him to pump up the tyres on the officer's car. He heard the other car stop as plainly as anything. Then they drove on. There had been a shot . . . Martin felt a sharp stab of pain go through him. He did not groan or swear. He was not conscious of feeling grief, but he was acutely aware of his heart at a certain point between his ribs. He stared dully out over the square, filled at this time of day with a milling crowd. How empty the world seemed! How could Erwin have left him so utterly alone in the world! It was at that moment that the thought flashed through his mind - he must send word to the girl, Erwin's sweetheart. And yet, after all, Erwin had never said anything about her. 'He did not share all his thoughts with me as I did mine with him,' Martin thought bitterly. After all, what did it matter if the girl worried a little? Erwin at least was beyond worry now. He was freed of all the perplexities of this world with which the living are continually burdened. He had died for his people, for whom he had fought ever since he could remember. More than that no man could do. Even he, Martin, could never do anything better were he to live a hundred years. Erwin was unassailable: he was inviolate.

III

The same Hauptmann von Klemm, whose words '*Macht Schluss*' had warned Erwin that he was facing death from which there was no escape, now ordered his chauffeur, Gustav Becker, to overhaul the Opel and make ready for the journey home. The little blue Opel had already been pumped up and driven back to the hotel.

The driver reported the accident and had even begun to add his own comments when his boss cut him short – he knew all about that. Then he saw to it that the driver was kept so busy he had no further time for thought.

Klemm was wearing civilian clothes. He had had two new suits made in record time. Despite his protests, his friends had persuaded him that his place was at home. It was his duty to take over the running of the factory he had inherited from his father. Men of his calibre were needed these days in the Rhineland. He would have no trouble crossing the frontier as long as his wife and child, his house and his factory, were in the Occupied Zone. It was ridiculous for his cousin to continue to represent him at the factory just because he wanted to stay in the north with his Guards Regiment – though that was understandable too. The Fatherland needed men like Klemm at the head of an industry where he controlled thousands of men and vast sums of money that would otherwise fall into the hands of heaven knew whom.

Becker drove the Opel up to the hotel and Klemm got in. The chauffeur was wearing a strange combination of an old pair of army trousers and a new coat. Klemm consoled him with the promise of a new white uniform, such as chauffeurs were now wearing, as soon as they reached Wiesbaden. Though Becker privately considered the prospects extremely poor, he kept his thoughts to himself. Klemm had already explained in careful detail, as one does when one is not quite sure of a point, just what Becker's new duties would be. The tie between the two men was one of comradeship based on sacrifice and a life shared together. Here, however, in the Occupied Zone they must be careful to preserve the status of chauffeur and employer.

At first Becker thought this was a joke. He had followed his Hauptmann all over Europe, from the West front to Galicia, from East Prussia to the Balkans. They had been decorated with the Iron Cross First Class at the same time, for defending, as sole survivors, a machine-gun nest in the Argonne. Another time they had fought their way side by side through the enemy's lines in Flanders. In Sofia, Klemm had had Becker taught to drive a car. He was determined to keep him with him both as orderly and chauffeur as long as possible. Finally, at Constantinople, they were ordered home. Becker had driven Klemm back to Berlin after the armistice, through all the dangers of the Balkans and through the Sodom and Gomorrah of Austria and Hungary. The old states had collapsed before they could get from one border to the other. Once

they picked up a Hungarian Red who thought they were taking him to Greek territory. They had driven out of their way, chuckling with glee, to hand him over to the authorities in White Hungary. Later, when the army was disbanded and all the soldiers rushed home, the White Guard was incorporated into the restricted army. If Becker were to count up all the miles he had driven his Hauptmann that winter round Berlin they would reach from one end of Europe to the other. On the night of the greatest danger last week when Becker drove his Hauptmann four times from the battlefield to Staff Headquarters, he had had the bright idea of discarding their own car, which was well known to the Reds, and borrowing a foreign car from one of the South American consulates.

As they drove out of Berlin, Klemm kept up a desultory conversation with his chauffeur. The city was quiet now. No more streets with waves of human beings in full flight; no more outcries; no wild-looking faces. No one lingered to read the placards tacked up on the walls. 'The worst is over,' said Klemm.

'Liebknecht and the woman,' Becker said.

The Hauptmann pulled up his knees. Becker thought at first he was asleep. Then in the mirror he saw the smoke curling slowly from Klemm's cigarette. As he lay back in the car half asleep, half awake, Klemm was thinking how happy his father, if he were still alive, would now be over his homecoming. Strange how the dead were always right, even if it did take one some time to realize it. From childhood, Klemm had been determined to join the regular army. He had pleaded to be sent to a cadet school, but his father had refused. His boy must go to some solid secondary school or other in Mainz or Wiesbaden like the sons of the Henkels and the Opels, the sons of vintners and factory-owners in the neighbourhood. The higher courses were not necessary. Let him take his *Abitur* as all the young boys of his class did. If, meantime, his father should acquire a 'von' for him, no one would remember after a while whether he had won it on some battlefield or in the factory smoke of Amoenburg. Father and son were in perfect agreement however when, at the beginning of the war, young Klemm joined the army as a cadet after finishing an abbreviated course and passing his examinations. He was wounded a number of times and given the coveted title of nobility reserved for men of wealth. This stilled the boy's conscience. However, he quarrelled with his father once more. The elder Klemm objected to his son's marriage to Lenore von Wenslow, who had nursed him in a field hospital, on the ground that he was marrying the girl from a false sense of honour. There were

plenty of nice girls here at home – the nieces of Banker Schroeder or the Class girl. Later on, old Klemm made friends with his daughter-in-law, though he privately thought her too dull and reserved for his son. By the time he died he had forgiven her wholeheartedly, for he had lived long enough to witness the birth of a grandson, the result of Klemm's visit home on leave on his way from the West front to the Balkans.

Klemm cared more for his little son than he did for his wife. Now, however, with his father's death, there would be an end to all opposition and he would have peace. 'Well, I'm a married man. We'll see what sort of a wife I picked for myself in the war.'

Becker drove carefully as he always did when his Hauptmann slept. They travelled through the night so as to reach the frontier by daylight. Several times Klemm ordered Becker to stop at a station restaurant. They had a drink together at the same table. To Becker such moments fully repaid him for the long hours of strenuous driving. Klemm always made a point of overlooking his chauffeur's frank, abrupt exclamations.

'In the field hospital, between operations . . .'

'*Jawohl*, Herr Hauptmann.'

'The whole room was hazy. I couldn't even recognize her little face under the big white cap, but I knew, here she comes, here comes Lenore. That's what you call love, pure and simple. I couldn't even touch her, I was too weak.'

'*Jawohl*, Herr Hauptmann.'

'Better cut out the Hauptmann. We're coming to the French Zone now.' And as they drove on Klemm remarked: 'A man could hold this whole district with one machine gun.'

The land between Berlin and Frankfurt was aglow with a ghostly light from the fiery reflection of Leuna. Becker did not altogether understand the explanation of synthetic nitrogen, but he liked the tone of his Hauptmann's voice and he was proud of German inventiveness. Klemm's thoughts leapt forward.

'Good thing we're going home.'

'*Jawohl*, Herr von Klemm,' Becker said. He knew that 'we' referred to his Hauptmann and himself. They drove for more than an hour before the fires of Leuna disappeared as if turned to ashes in the black of a moonless night. Klemm thought sleepily, following the line of his father's thinking: work like that is just as rewarding to man as service in the army. During the first part of the journey he had classified the countryside and the people from a military point of view. From Merseburg on he began to look at villages and roads

as a man does who intends to make his home there. He slept soundly till they came to Giessen. They left Frankfurt behind in the early morning hours. Though it was January and the weather was cold, the city seemed to be full of sunlight and dotted here and there with green. As they approached Hoechst, Klemm gave his chauffeur a few instructions. They were getting into the French Occupied Zone now. Becker was to keep his mouth shut and try not to attract attention so that the authorities shouldn't start questioning them. No one could tell, to look at them, what they had been up to this past year. They must get home as fast as possible. There would probably be a few Senegalese as usual on guard at the frontier. When the nigger asked for their pass, Becker must keep as cool as if the nigger were made of chocolate.

In Hoechst-Griesheim they drew up in front of the inn where little bespectacled Erbenbeck, head clerk in Klemm's firm, was waiting for them. Erbenbeck had brought permits for Klemm, the chauffeur and the car to pass the frontier. Klemm grumbled – an outrage that such a thing should be necessary to go from one German city to another!

'My dear Herr von Klemm, we've lost the war.'

'We didn't notice much of that, eh, Becker? In the Argonne forest.'

'No,' Becker said. 'Only these Frenchies who're spreading themselves all over the place here ran like rabbits there.'

Erbenbeck twirled his pointed beard.

'So that's the way the wind blows,' he thought. 'Very well. We can take our cue from that.'

There was no Senegalese at the frontier, only a thin, blond Frenchman. Erbenbeck translated fluently. They swung past a couple of villages, along the right bank of the Rhine. The air was heavy with rain, and the Taunus, its slopes clearly outlined, looked very near. Becker thought the tricolour flying from every roof and tower looked like the seal a bailiff stamps on mortgages. While he and his Hauptmann had been shedding their blood, these dirty crooks here at home had been slyly letting foreign crooks into their own land. However he kept his thoughts to himself – Klemm's order had been explicit.

On the left bank of the Rhine, in Mainz, the tricolour waved from the house that had once been the Grand Ducal palace. Here in this city Klemm had gone to school. He had played with his comrades on the Au beneath the bridges. He had almost chopped off his finger cutting willow catkins. Just here he had once driven past with his father and, just as today, a few chestnut branches had snapped

off. Becker sighted two patrols up ahead at the turn of the road. At last the black menace!

Half-way home they stopped to let out the head clerk in front of his tiny house, trimmed like a knight's castle with towers and stucco dwarfs. As they drove off, Erbenbeck was already answering his wife's eager questions:

'He looks exactly like his father. Seems to be keenly patriotic.'

'Then you'd better be careful about your French friends,' his wife warned.

'Business acquaintances, that's all,' replied Erbenbeck hastily. 'And even Klemm won't go so far as to hold up the lacquer order for Armont.'

As they drove into Elteville, Becker looked about with calm curiosity at the many bushes in bloom and the sleepy old country houses. Like all travellers returning home after a long absence, it seemed to Klemm not as if he were recognizing the countryside again but as if the country greeted him. The boathouse saw him pass, the little isle, not much bigger than a floating clump of bushes, even the curved wing of the garden entrance knew him before he could say to himself - 'At last I'm home.' The entrance gate stood at the corner of a sharp angle where the irregular piece of garden ended. The coat of arms, washed and worn by many rains, had nothing to do with the Klemm family. It had been put there years ago by the original owner long since vanished. When the Klemms bought the place they had it all renovated. Klemm pulled the bell. He remembered you had to pull it several times before it rang.

A maid opened the door and his wife came running out and flung herself into his arms. He was embarrassed, but managed to conceal it, soothing her as one soothes an excited child, stroking her hair gently. At last she quieted down and stood silently beside him. How long had he known her already! How time rushes by in a war if you don't look out! That time she had taken him unawares in a dark corner of the hospital and overwhelmed him with a hailstorm of kisses - as unexpected as when a dim light suddenly flashes in the dark. Since then he had never seen any sign of her impetuosity save in a sudden darkening of her light eyes, which changed to blue or grey according to her mood. Becker preferred the brown eyes, round and bright as a cherry, of the maid who helped to unload the luggage. Klemm ordered them to prepare a decent room for Becker and to give him a stein of dark beer. That pleased Becker; things like that showed the household at once what his *Hauptmann* thought of him.

'What are you going to do with the old chauffeur now?' asked his wife as they went up to the nursery. Alfons, the former chauffeur, had been first coachman, then chauffeur in the Klemm household. When the two horses were put out to pasture Alfons had taken just as good care of them as of the Opel which, with great difficulty, he had learned to drive. Of late he had enjoyed driving young Frau von Klemm. She seemed to get so much pleasure out of driving, to which she was evidently not accustomed. Sometimes she chatted freely with him, telling him how much she would like to take her Tante Amalie out driving too. Tante Amalie was the old maiden aunt in Potsdam who had been a mother to her and to her brother. But her aunt had not even enough money for the journey from Potsdam to the Rhine. As for taking anything from her niece - 'You don't know our Tante Amalie.' The old chauffeur could imagine quite a number of things, and above all a proud old aunt.

'We'll pension him off,' said Klemm answering Lenore's question.

'Will he continue to sleep here in the house?'

'Nonsense! He'll get one of those workers' cottages in our factory settlement.'

Lenore could not have said why she was so disappointed. She took the baby's rattle away from her husband and laid it in the crib. In that snow-white nursery the dark brown, old-fashioned crib with its carvings struck a strange note. Here in the nursery Lenore liked to wear her nurse's apron and cap, a uniform that made Klemm feel somewhat more at home. He told her how much he owed to Becker - the time Becker saved his life in the Argonne; those dangerous trips from the Balkans home over countless frontiers; the last days in Berlin.

'What a funny chin he has,' he said of the baby. Lenore did not like to say that the child looked like his grandfather Wenzlow, who had gone by the nickname of 'Nutcracker' in the Casino. It suddenly struck Klemm that his brother-in-law had the same-shaped chin.

'Why didn't Fritz come with you?' asked his wife.

How did she think Wenzlow could get away from Berlin now? They had just broken in a so-called Republic. They could hardly blow up the Spartakists on the street and at the same time tolerate them in the execution councils. That's why the government had to call back the officers again, though only yesterday they were ripping the insignia off their shoulders. Now they were sticking them on again because they didn't dare to get along without them. The Social Democrat ministers now warming the throne would never be able to deal with the Usepeters alone. A dependant Sozi had as

much chance against an independent Sozi as a wolf hound against a wolf. The red socks had made the city unsafe. No one dared to shoot from the barracks in the Chausseestrasse into the mob. A lieutenant had finally drawn his revolver and had got into all sorts of trouble. A few days ago the White Guards stormed the Marstall and had finally got their hands on the fellows. Then someone in authority had called for a legal trial with witnesses and a hearing and God knows what. On their way to Headquarters they had overtaken one of the prisoners and finished him off before he could escape.

Klemm's young wife listened in silence, her eyes darkening now and then as if his words were solid and cast shadows.

Downstairs in the kitchen, Becker, the chauffeur, was telling the same story to an audience composed of the housemaid, the little kitchen-maid with thick plaits, the cook, and the cook's husband, the gardener. They had sat Becker down to a feast of ham and eggs. There was certainly nothing niggardly about this household. They must think a lot of him. His own family at home in Westphalie had never paid so much attention to him. These people hung on his words with the greatest excitement. Here on the Rhine things were fairly quiet.

A little shrivelled up old man came into the kitchen. He refused to sit down at the table but accepted a couple of eggs and wrapped them in a newspaper.

'You must be the new chauffeur,' he said to Becker. 'I'm the old one.' Then he told them he was going home to Bingen, to live with his sister. He would have a little income, enough for pocket-money. And this would be a great help to his sister. He wished them all good-night, and before they could say Jack Robinson he had vanished. After he had gone they began to talk among themselves, surprised at this abrupt farewell after twenty years in the same house. They compared their new master with the old one. Becker said that of course he had not had the pleasure of knowing old Herr von Klemm, but he could hardly believe any man could ever come up to his employer.

The old chauffeur went out through the side gate overlooking the Rhine. At this hour, even in winter, his young mistress was in the habit of sitting there on a bench to watch the steamers and barges go by. This afternoon, too, she had escaped from the house for a few moments alone. Now her eyes were as grey as the water. She turned pale as the old man took off his cap respectfully, as became one of his station, and wished her happiness for the rest of

her life. She took a little garnet cross from her neck, an inheritance from her mother, and put it in his hand. He must give it to his sister in Bingen. She wanted him to have something from her. The little old man was very pleased that he had a present to take home with him. He tramped heavily down to the ferry. On the other side of the river he boarded the train and went away. His young mistress looked after him sadly.

IV

The same soldier who should have taken Erwin to a hearing, but took him instead to his death and then helped to bury him, now stood guard before the entrance to his barracks in the Chausseestrasse. The former infantry barracks had been taken over by a detachment of the Guards stationed in Berlin. It was a dull Sunday morning. The usual scene – a few children playing in the street and the same door at the dairy swinging open and shut. Nadler sniffed. No smell of mutiny in the air today. The city appeared to sleep: not a sign of a demonstration or a manifesto or even a really exciting funeral. A few days ago at Liebknecht's funeral not nearly so many Reds had turned out as they had expected. That gang had got the wind up at last, thought Nadler. Probably decided it wouldn't make old Karl any deader if they didn't show up. But they still hadn't found Rosa. There was a rumour she had been thrown into the water. If that was so, the fat old Frau had certainly gone to the bottom.

Well, the worst had been cleared out. If he could only say the same for things at home! His wife had written him a furious letter, hammering away at him because he had not come home. And home was only three hours away, at Schwielowsee. His farm was going to rack and ruin. All the farmers had come home months ago. The whole trouble was that Nadler was just a fool about playing soldier; she supposed he couldn't bear to tear himself away from his gun. The woman must have worked herself into a terrible rage to write him such a long letter, longer than all her other letters to the front put together. She had been obliged to let another piece of land. He needn't get the notion that his brother Christian could take his place. There was many a neighbour with a good wooden leg who could work better than Christian with his hip-bone all shot away. Every step he took he had to swing his leg in a circle, as you might say. The rent money was barely enough to pay the taxes. But if she bought the two cows she had to have then she would also need the land she had let for clover.

The worst about sentry duty was that it gave a man time to think. Nadler supposed he really must go home some day. But he had no desire to do so; not even to see his wife, though she wasn't so bad, nor the children; certainly not for the fields. It made him shudder even to think of his life as a farmer before the war. Christian, shot to pieces as he was, must just dig as best as he could on the farm as long as he, Wilhelm, was needed here. What was it his own captain, Gerstenberg, had said yesterday when, in the first confusion produced by that crazy letter, Nadler had hinted at the question of a discharge?

'You must make it clear to your wife, Nadler,' he had said, 'that the Reich is more important than her potato field. You have shown yourself here a man of courage. If we lose everything now under the Versailles Treaty, we'll need men like you more than ever. For our Guards Regiments will be our last strength. You've seen for yourself. Without us, everything goes wrong.'

Nadler felt like a horse harnessed to the plough after he has pranced before a company of soldiers. He pulls the plough for a while perhaps; then he hears the bugles – and away he runs.

Nadler snapped to attention. A captain, accompanied by two lieutenants, came out of the barracks. Now where have I seen that one on the right? thought Nadler; the one with the springy walk, a fine-looking fellow, smart and well set up. Though of course there wasn't a man on earth to equal Gerstenberg. Suddenly Nadler remembered. To be sure! It was that night after the big battle when he'd been ordered to take a prisoner to Nowawes. The lieutenant was one of the three officers who got out of the car with a flat tyre. Later on they had hit on the idea of lightening the load. At the time Nadler had reported the reason for his inability to deliver his prisoner. In those days there was always something happening. Today he had nothing to do but worry about that silly letter of his wife's. At least with the remission of taxes – the prerogative of all men who had fought in the war – he could give his wife a little help. Then she wouldn't have to lease the land to pay taxes, and she could have enough clover for two more cows. Captain Gerstenberg must certainly have a lot of influence. And he was always ready to listen to his men. He would be sure to know the man Nadler should go to about getting his taxes remitted. His wife could just worry along as best she could with his brother Christian. The thought of going home made him shudder.

Wenzlow, the officer who had shot the prisoner at Klemm's command, invited Lieven to go home with him to his Tante Amalie's in Potsdam. Ever since he could remember, Tante Amalie, his father's unmarried sister, had taken the place of the mother who had died while Wenzlow and his sister Lenore, now Frau von Klemm, were still very young. Doing without servants, Tante Amalie had managed her house and tended her garden herself in order to save every penny of her limited income for the children's education. Their father, an officer in the regular army, had been retired early in life – the result of intrigues, he always insisted. In 1914 he had been recalled to active service and had been killed at the front. But his constant complaints and his harsh rule had made his children's youth a time of misery. True, they found Tante Amalie's passion for cleanliness and order equally disturbing. But today Wenzlow understood that the real motive behind the old lady's inclination to make a moral issue of every unpolished shoe, every broken plate, every lost handkerchief, was her passionate determination to keep up the family morale.

If this peace offer is true, he thought, if the Guards are disbanded, what will become of me and what will happen to her? She made it possible for me to have the career my family has followed for three hundred years. She made a home for me. After the uncertain years of war, he clung more tenaciously than ever to the unpretentious little house in the Scharnhorststrasse, built over a hundred years ago in a barely distinguishable mixture of the classic and the baroque. Nor had Tante Amalie's incessant efforts sufficed to halt the decay that gave the little garden and the façade a look of sadness and poverty.

Not till he reached the front door did Wenzlow wonder why he had invited Lieven to spend Sunday with him. While their common experiences in the war had not made them exactly close friends, at least they had served to bring them together. This slight tie was strengthened by the fact that Wenzlow knew that Lieven was a friend of his brother-in-law's and Lieven that Wenzlow was his friend's brother-in-law. Wenzlow was unconsciously jealous because the brilliant and charming Klemm obviously preferred Lieven's company to his brother-in-law's, which he merely tolerated. Hitherto Wenzlow had never given much thought to the character and idiosyncrasies of the man he classified in his mind as 'the friend of my brother-in-law, Klemm'. Now, for the first time, as he heard Tante

Amalie's steps on the inside stairs, he felt how out of place Lieven was here. Lieven, meanwhile, was examining the worn and rain-washed caryatids to right and to left of the entrance. Silently he compared the stone maidens with Tante Amalie as he bowed to kiss her hand. She looked to him as if she had been pressed flat where her breasts should have been. Obviously the only bare breasts he would have a chance to see in this place where those of the two stone maidens. Tante Amalie's long neck was encased in a high standing collar that just showed the tips of her ears. Wenzlow noticed that the knot of hair twisted together on top of her head was no longer the light blonde colour of his childhood, but now quite frankly white. At that moment he looked up and caught his aunt stealing a glance at him – the nephew of whom she could not have been prouder had he been her own son.

At dinner Lieven concealed his amusement behind the formality of a guest and answered Tante Amalie's polite questions with equal courtesy. Yes, he was one of the Lievens who owned an estate beyond Riga. The heir was his cousin – or rather, had been. The Bolsheviks had, of course, seized everything they could lay their hands on. The first thing the Germans must do was to get all that back again. And, to make matters worse, vulgarians of every kind were spreading themselves all over the place now; people one had never heard of before. 'Because, you see, *gnädiges Fräulein*, to interfere effectively one must at least know on which side. The English are all for the Bolsheviks now. We Germans are their enemies. So they invent a Lilliputian state and call it Lettland.'

He emptied the salt-box on his salad. Tante Amalie did not approve of that. She did not approve of her guest's eyes either. They were blue, to be sure, but slanting – and then that strange accent, at once soft and rough. He picked at her 'mock hare'. 'I can stand being hungry and never make a fuss,' Lieven thought; 'I can stand the wildest feasts; but this stuff is hard to take.' However, Tante Amalie was somewhat mollified when he praised her china, which was as old as her house, and admiring the Chodowiecki embroidery over the sofa.

'Will this boring afternoon never come to an end?' thought Lieven. And more to cheer himself up than the others, he suddenly became quite gay and lively. Later, after dinner, when they called on the family next door, he made an excellent show of high spirits. On a balcony that had been converted into a winter garden, family and guests gathered around the head of the house, a wounded war veteran, Major von Malzahn. The Major's wife, the half-

grown daughter who still wore her hair in long pigtaills, the little boy, Wenzlow, Tante Amalie – all hung on Lieven's words. Even Wenzlow had never heard his friend tell such fascinating stories. Here in this household they had heard enough about the war, it is true, but Lieven's escape from the prison camp – he had been interned in St. Petersburg at the beginning of the war – along the Baltic Coast to Finland, straight through the Bolshevik Army, was a picture of the front they did not know. Here, on their own balcony, they heard stories which had they read them in a newspaper they would have dismissed as lies; they learned to what depths a mob can sink! Burning villas and hanging the owners!

'One thing's certain, I'm going home tomorrow morning,' Lieven thought when, after he had managed to get through supper, he was at last able to escape to bed. There was nothing left of the hollow, tedious day but the shadows of bare branches against the darkened window. The bed was hard, though the room, he had been told, had belonged to the daughter, Lenore, when she was a young girl. She certainly didn't have a bed of roses here, he thought. She is better off now.

He was just trying to imagine what sort of person she was, when someone knocked hastily on the door. Wenzlow entered and, much to Lieven's annoyance, promptly came over and sat down on the edge of the bed. Lieven detested that sort of familiarity. Wenzlow was excited: 'I've just been reading the paper in my room. It says they've dug up the dead man. Just this side of Nowawes where they are building the road.'

'Well, what of it? They'll send him to the crematorium and then to the cemetery.'

'But suppose someone hears about us and we're questioned?'

'Simple! He tried to escape and we had to shoot him,' said Lieven. 'In case it occurs to anyone to ask us. However I can't imagine why it should.' To himself he thought: Why the hell doesn't this fellow get off my bed! I can't even stand having a woman sit on my bed. They can look down at you and stare in your face from above.

'Well,' said Wenzlow, 'they'll see at once that this fellow wasn't shot from behind. He was shot through the forehead.'

'All right then. He turned his head just as we caught up with him.'

'We? Why we? The first thing they'll do is to look for the man who fired the shot. That, I believe, is the procedure in an investigation.'

It hasn't taken him long to work this all out, Lieven thought to himself, in amusement. Which one of us fired the shot anyhow? There were some other people there. The chauffeur? The guard? Klemm? I, myself? By God, I believe it was Wenzlow. It's just occurred to him. And the silly ass is worrying himself sick about it.

He put a hand on Wenzlow's arm:

'We'll give out that we were all there and that we all fired at the same time. And none of us can remember the details. I, for instance, have forgotten all about it by this time.'

'But he had only a single wound in his forehead. Then they'll hunt for the places where all our bullets went in.'

'Well, they won't find them in a hurry. Don't worry now. Sounds to me as though you haven't had much experience with this sort of thing.'

'All right, but there are always a couple of officious brass-hats that are bound to interfere. Some lawyer or other will go poking his nose into the mess. The Independents are only too glad when they can raise a stink.'

'Oh, for God's sake, cut it out! First of all, the people can't keep their own Republic in order, then they call on us for help. We clean up their capital for them and they begin to yammer about the muck we got rid of. To hell with it! There's nothing to it! It's all your imagination, Wenzlow. Now go and lie down and get some sleep.'

'Thank God, I've got him out of the room,' thought Lieven. He lighted a cigarette and smoked for a while as was his habit before falling asleep. The shadows of the branches moved in the faint light from the lamp. What was all that stuff Wenzlow was talking about? There'll never be any legal investigation.

How many, many beds have I slept in these last years, Lieven mused sleepily. The tiny light on the end of his cigarette - he had no other light of his own.

Two

I

IT WAS NOT, as he thought, the faint light shining from behind Wenzlow's curtain and outlining the shadowy movements of restless branches that awakened Lieven. In his dream, Tante Amalie had come so close to his bed that he thought in mild desperation: if only that dreadful creature doesn't sit on my bed! Wenzlow too still stood hesitating in the doorway. Poor fellow, losing sleep over an unimportant piece of news in the paper. Lieven sat up in bed. He wondered why Wenzlow was speaking Russian to him. No, it wasn't Wenzlow. He understood now. It was Captain Kaschevnikow's orderly who had waked him. Well, perhaps not the orderly either, but the full moon, shining straight on Lieven's face. Thank God, he was not in the Scharnhorststrasse in Potsdam! He was in a farmhouse a few hours from Riga, occupied by the staff to which Kaschevnikow was attached as Russian liaison officer and Lieven as the German.

The summer night was so mild, the moonlight so tenuous, that even after he was awake memories of past experiences seemed to mingle with memories of dreams, like the feeble light in the farmhouse room with the vague shadows of the moon. He was now as wide awake as a man could be on a night like that. Life, with its wealth of details, trenchant and unimportant, flowed through him: Tante Amalie's mannish profile as she read the peace terms at breakfast: 'That would just suit Herr Clemenceau. So we sixty million Germans - how many people have we actually, Lieven? - are to slave ten years for him and shed tears of remorse, are we, because we have not lost the war at all . . .' And Sergei, Kaschevnikow's orderly, was saying in Russian which sounded not a bit clearer, not even quite as sharp as Tante Amalie's dream voice:

'The Captain says the Herr Leutnant has arrived.'

That is the moon, not the lamp - Lieven knew now. But why am I here? Oh yes, that's right, because we Balts are helping the Russians drive out the Soviets. How penetrating the moonlight is, faint, but penetrating! Von der Goltz is fighting Belmondts at Riga now. The Letts don't like us any better than they do the Russians. Noske has already called us back home. He dances to the tune the English pipe.

I don't know how it is all going to end. I don't want to know. The main thing is to be active, to keep moving.

'The gentlemen wish to see you, sir,' the orderly repeated.

Gentlemen? That's right. Otto Lieven has arrived. Ernst Lieven thrust his bare legs over the side of the bed. Moonlight neither cools nor warms. It smeared itself all over his toes.

The orderly stood waiting to hand him his clothes. Kaschevnikow had trained him well.

The room next door was already thick with smoke from the cigarettes of the two officers. Kaschevnikow wore a very short, close-cropped beard. He was a heavily built man, but lithe in his movements. In contrast to the elder Lieven he looked like a stable-boy beside a crusader. There was a distinct family resemblance between the two Lievens. The elder Lieven put out his cigarette. 'We can be back by eight if we hurry.'

They mounted their horses and started off, the orderly riding behind them. The night was still. It was only a few hours to dawn. Around them the devastated fields lay bathed in moonlight. And the effect of the moon's reflection in the water made the woods beyond the lakes appear to drift like clouds across the sky. All through the night not a shot had been fired. The sound of the horses' hoofs was ghostlike, as if they were wrapped. The village through which they rode looked haunted rather than squalid. And, like ghosts, lights and shadows played over the church riddled with shot.

'This is where it begins,' said Otto Lieven. They reined in their horses. He described a curve with his riding-crop. 'Down there in the pasture land. A few houses between the woods and the shore -- that is our fishing village. The sea goes with it.'

For six hundred years that moonlit countryside, part fields, part woods, indented here and there by the sea, had been Lieven property. Two years earlier the new Soviet power had driven them out. Then the White Russians had driven out the Reds. They had promised to restore their land to those Baltic landowners who came to their aid, and Von der Goltz, who had turned against the Imperial land and naval forces, was recruiting his troops to suit himself. He attracted many young men from Germany who had lost their homes through the peace; a few because their lands were cut off by the new frontiers, the majority because their real homeland was war. Here in the east soldiers were still needed. Up here the outcome was still undecided. On this little spot of Europe there was still a chance of that ever-alluring gamble with life that a man can win only when he is willing to lose it.

'Down below there our windmill is still standing,' Otto Ljeven said. 'It wasn't damaged.'

'I wish I could show you my parents' home, too,' the Russian said. 'It is quite a good way away in the direction of Kasan on the Volga.'

The younger Ljeven thought: 'I could not show them any home, even if we rode all around the earth.' He knew the house that Otto was gazing at with burning eyes, only from holiday visits as a child. Nor had he ever felt a longing to go back to it. It had been enough for him to know that somewhere on earth, somewhere in the family there was a spot, immovably firm and unshakable, where if necessary he might find shelter and peace should he so desire. But Ernst Ljeven had never felt any desire for peace. He was by nature a nomad like his father before him, with the same faculty for always turning expediency into good fortune. He had wandered from one city to another, from Berlin to Riga, from Riga to Stockholm, from Stockholm to St. Petersburg where, as luck would have it, there was a place open in the consulate. To him it was a comfortable thought that, if he needed it, there was a bit of earth to which he could turn and for which he bore no responsibility. Kaschevnikow was saying: 'The moment one of us is really home again, we shall all forget about the Soviet spectre.'

The younger Ljeven spurred his horse ahead on the home stretch. They galloped past the outskirts of a village. As they watered their horses at the well a couple of young boys glowered at them from a nearby balcony, as if the officers were drawing their blood instead of water from their village well. Two women were seated at a table, the older woman feeding a child. Suddenly the young girl gave a cry and, rushing over to the elder Ljeven, grasped his hand and began kissing it. She was beside herself with excitement. The boys growled menacingly. One of them grabbed hold of the young woman. She made a sharp reply, but she went back to her place at the table. And while her family scolded her, she gazed after Ljeven with shining eyes.

'She was one of our people,' Otto Ljeven explained. 'She was born on the estate.'

That evening Ernst Ljeven came back through the same village with a convoy of farm carts commandeered with great difficulty for transporting the wounded. His own horse had been shot from under him and left dead somewhere on the road. His cousin lay seriously wounded in a stationmaster's house an hour away. The silent night had ended in an unexpected attack, the tail-end of a fight in the

capital which had been forced out into the countryside. The territory in which the Lieven estate lay, as far as the railway line, had again changed hands. The village had been burned and the inhabitants were either dead or in flight. Here and there one saw a few faces, frozen with shock, unbending only to stare grimly at their own wounded or with fierce hatred at the wounded of the enemy. Lieven hurried the transport as fast as he could. It would be a miracle if they reached the railway line alive. There was a rumour that the English had backed the Lett attack in order to wipe out the last of the Germans, who had not obeyed their own army order to return to their homes. The English had armed the population and had even advanced money to the government, so long as they kept out all foreigners, Germans and Russians, both Whites and Reds.

If Otto is seriously wounded, Lieven thought, then I am the only one left; the head of a family that does not exist; heir to a vanished estate. He turned the thought over in his mind. The mental picture was as plain to him as a map: the slowly rotting fields, the windmill, Plackensee with the fishing village, the woods on the opposite side of the shore. The convoy passed under the balcony from which, early that morning, the young woman had greeted his cousin so impetuously. The roof had fallen in. The rear wall was riddled with bullets, so that one could see pieces of human beings and broken furniture in the debris. Lieven halted abruptly and an expression of scorn came over his face at the sight of that utter devastation. For only war, only a well-aimed rifle salvo, can lay bare the secret of secrets that men usually keep hidden all the days of their lives.

The two boys who had been so hostile that morning now lay dead in their kitchen amid the rubble of walls and stove. One clasped his gun to his breast as if it were a baby. Dying, he had bitten the stock. The other was still clutching the calf of his leg which hung loose to his hip - his thigh was torn to ribbons. A third, shot through the chest, lay outstretched in the middle of the road. The convoy, in too great a hurry to turn out, rolled over his body - mute evidence that victory does a man no good if he cannot live to see it. The old grandmother still sat in silent dignity beneath the balcony in her place behind the table, the only piece of furniture undamaged. She too had been shot and had slipped to the side in a strange position. The only living creature in that group was the child she had been feeding that morning. The little girl was taking advantage of the opportunity to eat as much as she wanted for once in her little life. That precious food, usually so carefully apportioned, was now all hers and she was gobbling everything in sight. She came running

up to the carts, laughing up at Lieven, her little mouth all sheary with food. Lieven leaned down, swung the child up in the air and then stood her on her feet again. She was as light as a feather. How strangely cold her eyes are, he thought, amber gold, and how fine and frail her little face! Truly God scatters his gifts generously, almost *ad absurdum*, among the daughters of the earth!

II

Wenzlow boarded the night train at the Anhalter Bahnhof. He had decided to spend his leave with the Klemms, less because of a longing to see his sister again than a desire to have a private talk with his brother-in-law. He was still a little worried about the discovery of the body in the Grünewald, though, apart from the brief notice in the newspaper, nothing more had come of it. Once, however, in his presence he had heard someone say that the chauffeur who had been ordered to take the prisoner to Nowawes was certain to get a summons. The summons would not be served because the man in question was certainly safe across the border long before this. As Lieven had suggested, the body they had found probably had no connection with them whatsoever. Who, Lieven had asked, would instigate the summons anyway?

It was all very well for Lieven to talk like that. He had been with his brigade in the Baltic provinces for some time now. But he, Wenzlow, was doing his military service at home. He shared Lieven's contempt for people who made no bones about joining the army under the Weimar Republic on any grounds whatsoever. Major von Malzahn, his father's friend, tried to explain to him how necessary it was to pump as much healthy blood as possible into the sick pigmy to which the army had shrunk as a result of the Versailles Treaty. To leave the service was easy and foolish: they needed to get a few men they could trust into the new government.

When the train stopped at Frankfurt early in the morning, the first thing Wenzlow saw was a familiar face on the platform - his brother-in-law's chauffeur. Wenzlow nodded curtly. Neither was accustomed to seeing the other in civilian clothes. 'He is just as long-faced as his sister,' thought Becker. Young Frau von Klemm never spoke to him except to give brief orders. Secretly she still missed her old chauffeur who had been discharged.

Becker explained that they had general permits - and by 'they' he meant Herr von Klemm and himself. Things were going fine. They were up to their eyes in big business. To avoid complications

today for the Herr Leutnant, a regular officer in Occupied Territory, Becker had borrowed Herr von Klemm's cousin's permit. The cousin was in conference at the moment. Becker would return the permit to him promptly.

Becker wished the Herr Leutnant would offer him a glass of beer, as his employer never failed to do, but the thought never occurred to Wenzlow. His face was cold. The only time he had ever crossed the Rhine bridges was during the war and then he had peered curiously over the shoulders of his comrades in the crowded transport at the river which he knew only from songs and schoolbooks. It was not so blue as he had expected, nor did it murmur: instead it was grey and silent. Just then a strong sweet whiff of jasmine blew towards them from one of the gardens they were passing. Wenzlow closed his eyes. The morning breeze smoothed out the wrinkles on his forehead.

Then the sweet garden scent was poisoned by the stench of factories. Following Klemm's order the chauffeur set Wenzlow down in Amoenburg. The porter led him into the leather-lined room reserved for guests and conferences; before Wenzlow could make up his mind who the old gentleman in the oil painting over the sofa might be, in walked Klemm. Beaming, he assured Wenzlow that he was jealous because his wife, Lenore, was looking forward with suspicious delight to her brother's arrival. Klemm looked handsomer than ever in civilian clothes. Wenzlow was embarrassed at his own suit of cheap material, badly wrinkled from the journey. To be sure he could not know that his brother-in-law's suit of English worsted came through an employee in Cologne in the British Occupied Territory. On the journey down from Berlin it had been difficult for Wenzlow to picture Klemm in his new setting and wearing civilian clothes. Now it was even more difficult for him to imagine him in any other.

Klemm ordered breakfast, wine and glasses. He was in the best of moods, retailing bits of gossip, telling amusing stories as men do who have a knack with words. He told the story of the loyal German who hates Frenchmen but is glad enough to drink their wine. Klemm, to be sure, was not filling the glasses with wine but with old cognac. It was a good thing he had got here at the right moment. His cousin had not been able to cope with the French stipulations . . . Klemm crumbled a biscuit . . . but he himself found it positively amusing to fight his way through the difficulties of the Occupation. You look as if everything amused you, thought Wenzlow. Whenever he was with Klemm he felt slightly awkward and helpless, yet at the

same time one always felt safe with Klemm wherever one was whether in a conference room or in the trenches at the front. 'I went to work at once and picked out the best men among my clerks and engineers. Also some from the miners. We have put our Verein on a firm foundation. We do some physical training and drill - officially just for sport, of course. That's chiefly for the young boys who were not in the war. It gives them a tremendous kick to pull off a thing like this right under the noses of the occupation authorities.' Then he asked how things were in Berlin. The Reds, Wenzlow told him, had quieted down a bit. They had succeeded in putting down the first big strikes of the year before the Reds had had a chance to get their fingers on the trigger and start shooting. Then, casually, he mentioned his principal reason for his visit. While working on a road out by Nowawes someone had found the fellow they had buried there that time - had Klemm forgotten all about it? They had had a flat tyre; the man, under arrest, drove past them. They changed cars; he, Klemm, had insisted on finishing the man off; that is, it was not absolutely certain that the fellow they found was the same one. In any case it might be a good idea for Klemm to pound into his chauffeur's head the right attitude for him to take if there should be an investigation . . .

'Nonsense,' said Klemm, 'there won't be any. And certainly not here in Occupied Territory. But now it's time for you to drive over to Elteville. I've just remembered that Lenore forbade me to cut the cherry-cake today at breakfast. She insists on setting it before you intact.'

Wenzlow looked forward to seeing his sister now that he had got rid of the matter uppermost on his mind. To be sure Klemm had made as light of it as Lieven. But Wenzlow was as pleased and comforted as if he had taken this overnight journey merely to hear from his brother-in-law that his anxiety was unfounded. Klemm's remarks had finally convinced him that it was childish even to think that the incident would have any consequences and equally childish to think of the incident itself. As the car turned into the entrance to the garden where the spray from the sprinklers glistened on espaliers and flower-beds, Wenzlow looked at the warm shining green through which he could see the white façade of the house and felt even more definitely relieved of his anxiety. Lenore flung her arms around his neck and clung to him so warmly that he could not help wondering: 'Whatever is the matter with her? She must be homesick.'

She called to Becker to bring the luggage to the guest-room. Later,

as she cut the cherry-cake, she looked at her brother and smiled, while, in the kitchen, Becker was agreeing with the housemaid that the brother was as stuck-up as his sister; in short, not to be compared with the master.

Lenore lighted a cigarette. That was the second surprising change in his sister. First the impetuous embrace, then smoking. Otherwise she was just the same. He recognized the blue striped dress she had worn as a young girl at home. He would have liked to stroke her hair but he was in the habit of repressing his emotions. He asked the usual questions. She answered, it seemed to him, faster than usual and with a smile on her lips that was new to him. 'I'll show you the baby after awhile. It seems strange to me to put on my white apron just to smear salve on his little behind instead of dressing the wounds of thirty seriously wounded men. This big house seems strange to me. I keep dividing it up - the dining-room would make a good operating-room. This entire wing would do for isolating infectious diseases. Now I'm running a Red Cross course so that our women will be prepared to nurse if there is another war. The fiancées and sisters of the young men who come to the meetings Klemm has been holding ever since he came back. That makes me feel that I'm not quite useless.'

From somewhere out of the Rhine valley came the sound of a trumpet. The *salut aux armes* rang blithely through the pink and gold morning. Lenore ran her hands through her brother's hair and laughed:

'I was just as startled as you the first time I heard it. I'm used to it now; otherwise I hardly ever notice the French. We no longer have troops quartered on us, only now and then a few officers come here, semi-officially. Afterwards we scrub the whole house from top to bottom to get the smell of their perfume out. Then, of course, I never go into the village - they are underfoot everywhere there.' She gazed happily at her brother. 'Eat all the cake if you want to. I remember when you were a child you used to say, "If I could only eat a whole cake by myself." Tell me about home. Tell me about Tante Amalie. I long to see her. Believe it or not, I never would have thought I could be homesick for Tante Amalie.' She moved her fingers on the tablecloth as if she were playing the piano. She still had the same boyish hands, long, thin and ringless. 'Of course I'm a mother now. I'm a *hausfrau*. In the war I was a nurse, being sent anywhere and everywhere. Then suddenly I was married, in this lovely house. I've never been able to picture Tante Amalie as a young girl. Yet I can't imagine her being old, either.'

'She has aged since the armistice,' said Wenzlow. 'Her hair is white.'

His sister looked at him in astonishment.

'I think the worst blow to her,' he added, 'was when the regiment her father and brother had served in was disbanded.'

'What will become of you now?'

'Of me? I don't believe you realize how important your question is. There is a chance I may stay in the regular army - if you can call it chance, under this government. I think Malzahn will pull wires with his friend, old Spranger. What else could I do? Escape across the border perhaps? Go into a bank? Ask your husband for a job? In the next months ten thousand more men will be let out of the army.'

'I always thought my little son would join your regiment some day,' said Lenore.

'Your little boy has a very nice niche waiting for him, nevertheless,' Wenzlow replied coolly. 'His father also had the idea of staying in the army and leaving the firm to his cousin. In any case you don't need to worry about your little son. He will never sell samples. He will never sit behind a cashier's desk.'

'I'm not so worried about the boy's future as you think,' Lenore said quietly. 'Not nearly so much as yours. I haven't much imagination. The future interests me very little. I am more concerned with the present.'

Later they paced up and down in the garden. She showed him the greenhouses and the trellises. Their thoughts flew to Tante Amalie, who carefully picked four bunches of currants in their tiny garden patch at home. A young man, his sleeves rolled up and wearing army trousers, was helping the gardener. Now he turned and stared after them. The gardener called out good-morning, but the boy merely muttered something that sounded like 'Mornin'.' Wenzlow caught his eye. It struck him that the fellow was staring at them with a peculiarly insolent expression on his face.

'He is here on a visit to his parents,' Lenore explained. 'His father is our gardener, his mother our cook. Yes, you are right. I can't stand the way he looks at one.'

'God knows what he has been up to or why he has skipped over into Occupied Territory.'

'You never know that here,' said Lenore. 'Every inch of the frontier is crowded with people who have found it too hot up North and make straight for the dividing line.'

Wenzlow said curtly: 'I don't like him.'

'I have already begged Klemm to send the boy away. I don't want him to think he can hide out here because his father is our gardener. He feels safe from pursuit here - beyond the reach of the law.'

As they paced to and fro, Wenzlow could feel the gardener's son watching them. He took his sister's arm. He felt extremely uncomfortable. 'Why is he staring at me?' he thought. 'He guesses who I am. That whole Red gang hangs together.' He was angry because the fellow was spoiling the peaceful holiday morning for him.

The gardener's son thought: 'Why does that chap keep looking over here at me? They're all alike, the whole lousy lot. They stink of parades and Guards Regiments and all that patriotic rubbish.'

He thought 'patriotic' with as much hate as Wenzlow thought 'Red'. The line that separated them was as deep as the Rhine which Wenzlow gazed at from the top step of the veranda. Beneath the brilliant summer sky the water looked a shade bluer than this morning, though just as quiet and without a shimmer, as if it was blue clear down to the bottom.

III

Sergeant Wilhelm Nadler was coming home for his Christmas leave. So much, and not a word more, did he deign to write to his wife. She still complained incessantly in her letters: it was high time for him to give up that war business once and for all: it was time for him to come home and put the farm in order. Now perhaps he himself would be able to pound into that stupid woman's head certain matters he did not care to trust to the mails - plans for the future which, even at this stage, were something more than rumours. He would explain to her how useless it was for him to follow the plough now and how little it mattered whether you paid the cattle-dealer or whether you let or did not let land on which to grow clover for a new cow. What was the use, he would point out to her - he was always pointing things out to her in his mind when he had nothing else to do - when this government, under which a man still led a dog's life, was breaking up. A new Reich, in which a man's debts would be cancelled, was much more important than that new sile she was always talking about in her letters.

He got off the train at the last station. From there he had nearly an hour's walk through woods and over the heath to his village, on the Schielowsee. He was wearing his military boots and an old tunic,

with the ribbon of his Guards Regiment in his buttonhole and his Iron Cross. In his knapsack he carried the odds and ends he wanted to take home for the holidays. He also carried the good old walking-stick he had carved for himself in the hospital, just as if he were still lame and needed it. He had cut notches in the bark to mark the principal battles, as one cuts notches on an *Alpenstock* to show the number of excursions one has made.

A little old man caught up with him, greeted him by name, and expressed his pleasure at seeing him again. Slowly it dawned on Nadler that the little man was Zeiben, the owner of the 'Eiche'. Zeiben and his village customers took great pride in the ancient oak that pushed its knotty roots right into the main room of the tavern. He'd been wondering why they hadn't seen Nadler at home for so long, and why wasn't he coming home for good this time, like the rest of his neighbours? To all of which Nadler explained that he could not be spared yet. Things were pretty bad these days in the capital. The army needed men like him. If they didn't keep Berlin running the whole Reich would go to pieces. The owner of the 'Eiche' told him that they had heard the guns far away here last year. His own boys had had a bellyful of war. The peace treaty was a mess, but half a loaf was better than no bread.

'The proverb does not apply,' said Nadler earnestly. 'If these people at home hadn't stopped up their ears when the Red dogs began barking and howling, no one would ever have thought of accepting such a shabby peace. We've kept the enemy out of the country. Now the crooks are letting the French in and we've just spent three long years giving them a good licking. Now they're asking us to hand over our money for that. The Jews won't pay for it - though Rothschild could settle the whole bill out of his own pocket. No, we're the fellows who've got to pay - just because we haven't anything. Fellows like you, Zeiben, and your boys and me and my brother Christian. And he's lost most of his bones already.'

The little old man was sincerely pleased that the conversation had moved down from the tenuous world of thought to a plane on which he felt quite at home. He suppressed a smirk.

'Yes, Christian has broken all his bones, but lucky for him he's still got what a man needs most.'

Wilhelm Nadler expressed some doubts as to whether a man in Christian's condition would ever find a woman to look at him. The old man gave him a sidelong glance, as if it were not worth while to turn his head, and made the silent observation that once again the man most closely concerned did not know what the whole village

was gossiping about. As if he felt it his duty to repair this lack, he began making cautious remarks about how unfortunate it was that Wilhelm had not only been in the war from the first to the last day, but that he had not taken advantage of the peace to come straight home. At this Nadler again explained with great care why just such men as he were greatly needed in Berlin.

The owner of the 'Eiche' replied:

'Men who have time for soldiering have no wives and no children. They don't have land that can go to pieces before they know what is up.'

His wife certainly had not had an easy time, Nadler agreed, but after all she had his brother on the spot to help her. At last the conversation had reached the very point towards which the old man had been edging. As they emerged from the woods onto the heath, he once more hinted that his neighbour was very unwise to leave the care of fields and family to his brother.

'Yes', Nadler agreed, 'Christian hasn't really got his strength back yet. He was pretty badly shot up.'

'True! True! He hasn't got his strength back - in one sense. And your boys are still too young. That leaves an awful lot of hard work for Liese. As to what he's still strong enough for - well, that's easy work for a woman.'

The lake shimmered between the first houses. Nadler began to ponder the old man's words. He scarcely noticed when they turned the corner into the village, or that the old man had left him, that people slapped him on the back, stared at him and called out to him as he passed on the way to his house.

The moment he opened the door he could smell the dinner Liese had prepared for him. He had written to tell her the time of his arrival. She was wearing a clean apron for the occasion. The plaits twisted round her head were the colour of corn that has lain too long out of doors - a little faded in places, darkened in others. She had lost her shape, he noticed, like a cake that has flattened out. Her face, with its merry light blue eyes and its freckles, was just the same. He looked his brother Christian up and down. Christian came limping towards him on one leg because he was either too much in a hurry or too lazy to swing his wounded leg in a circle at every step. He did not look his brother straight in the face, but stood to one side as if he were trying to watch him unobserved. In the five or six years he had been away from home, Wilhelm Nadler had known all sorts of women and had become almost a stranger to his own wife, but he was furiously angry at the thoughts the owner of

the 'Eiche' had planted in his mind. So that nice fat Liese had been sleeping with Christian, had she? During the meal Liese nursed her youngest child – the result of his father's visit home after the armistice. Wilhelm had never wasted any thoughts on his children, but now he stared anxiously at the baby. The little creature was so fair that his hair was almost white – a fact that made him look far more like his uncle than his father. Christian sat hunched up, quietly smoking his pipe. Liese began straight away to nag her husband. She told him again in detail what he already knew by heart from her letters – about the new cow, about the cattle-dealer Levi, about the clover and the lease. Then she introduced a brand new subject: if her husband would come home, Christian could set up as a shoemaker. He had learned how to make shoes, but if Wilhelm didn't come soon now and Christian had to keep on lending her a hand on the farm, Josef Winkler, who had also learned how to mend shoes, would get ahead of him. There was no room in the village for two new shoemakers.

Wilhelm Nadler reflected that talk like that did not sound as though Liese had any great fondness for Christian. He promised to come home within the year. He had to stay in the army till the autumn.

'Why's that? Everyone else is home!'

'They keep the best men. If they didn't, everything would be at sixes and sevens in the country.'

'Everything's at sixes and sevens here already,' the woman said.

'That's just it. We'll soon get things straightened out. And just you wait till the people are all settled. Just wait till all this riff-raff is out of the country. Then your fields will be all right too.'

He brought up the subject he had so often explained to her in his thoughts, only in words it didn't sound half so well, even though, in his eagerness to emphasize its importance, he divulged more than his oath of secrecy permitted. 'Just let the right people get at the helm and we'll have other laws. Then we'll all be better off. Then we'll be on top.'

'If it's the German people you're talking about,' said Liese, 'I'm no Chinaman. And if it's land, that means our field too.'

She noticed Christian scrabbling around in his tobacco pouch and she got up to give him some tobacco from the tin. As his brother limped out with his fresh pipe, Wilhelm burst out in a furious rage.

'If I see you having anything more to do with Christian, I'll beat you to a pulp.'

The woman did not appear to be startled. She looked at her man with a twinkle of amusement in her eye.

'Now look here,' she said. 'Is that the way to treat an invalid, specially your brother?'

Her freckles jumped about as if bewitched; sparks flashed from her ice-blue eyes. Wilhelm could not tell whether she was in earnest or poking fun at him. Insight was never his strong point. He thought in amazement: 'Why, she's a regular hussy.' Casually, as if the matter were of no importance to her, Liese began to explain that Christian could open the workshop if Wilhelm would really be home in time to settle the matter of the lease.

The moment Wilhelm went out to the barn to board up a broken window-frame, Liese opened the door to the room where Christian now slept.

'As long as Wilhelm is home,' she announced, 'keep out of the way as much as you can. Either he's smelt a rat himself or someone's put a flea in his ear. Give me time and I'll talk him out of it. But till then, there's to be nothing between you and me. What are you muttering about? I've got to get things straightened out on the farm or my children will be beggars. Wilhelm's the head of the house. He's got to come home and I'm not the one to scare him off.'

Christian looked the woman straight in the face, a long keen look. He thought: 'What can I say? She's right. I haven't anything to offer her. I can't hobble to Berlin on my half leg and play an organ in the streets.'

The trouble was she was just a little too clever. She knew how to get along in life too damned well. She could see in a flash things that Christian, who was by no means stupid, would lie awake and puzzle over night after night.

Wilhelm found life with his wife more exciting than he had thought it would be, save for the fact that she made him get up early to go to work in the fields for all the world as if he were still in the barracks. The stars still twinkled in the sky when Wilhelm crawled out of bed, but Liese was always up ahead of him. She had milked, fed the chickens, made the coffee, and prepared the noonday meal all before he put in an appearance. Then she harnessed the ox to the cart. Christian stayed at home to attend to the milk delivery. The children piled into the cart; the big ones as helpers, the baby to be nursed. Liese trotted beside the ox, prodding and shouting. Wilhelm stamped along a step behind her; he was not used to the children or to the working in the fields or to tending cows. When now and then a neighbour called to him he was annoyed by the mere fact that

they recognized him as he trotted along behind family and cart. To them he must appear just as in the old days; just like the rest of them. None of them recognized him for what he really was: still a man with a gun; still master over life and death.

The woman set the smallest child down in a furrow in the field. She was a much faster worker than her husband – the equal of two mowers. Once she glanced quickly at the furrow where her child lay sleeping as quietly as in his mother's lap under the immeasurable sky. The lake shimmered between the apple-trees. She was not to be outdone by her husband in anything. Even the motion of the scythe seemed strange to him now. Liese passed him in the rows as if she had to make up for the unearned pause when she nursed the child. A steamer tooted in the distance. It angered Wilhelm, as if someone were calling to him from another world. He was annoyed by the great white breast to which the woman crushed her child. He hung his scythe on the apple-tree and planted himself in front of her.

'That white woolly head looks too damned much like Christian.'

Liese shifted the child to the other breast to gain time before answering.

'That happens in families,' she said. 'He gets it from your father.'

The man jerked his scythe out of the tree.

The meal at home that day was not to be compared with the one of the day before. It was no better than an ordinary barracks' mess . . . Then off they went plodding about the fields again till dark. Wilhelm fumed with rage at the thought that this sort of life might go on till the end of his days. That apparently was what the good God had originally planned for him. 'You counted without your host.' By 'you' he meant God and by 'host' a man like Hauptmann Gerstenberg. For Wilhelm was experiencing something like the pangs of homesickness for Gerstenberg.

After supper he went to the tavern for a pint of beer. His friends treated him to one glass after another. As a rule these farmers were not given to such generosity. But Wilhelm began to talk and they found it exciting to listen to him. The great oak branches twisted in sharp ridges and knots between the boots on the floor. It would have made Wilhelm feel at home had he not been repelled today by everything connected with home. The younger farmers, some of them still wearing their uniform jackets, minus the insignia, examined his new tunic curiously. He had slipped it on just outside the tavern door. They asked him what the insignia stood for. Nadler did not have to be coaxed for an explanation. He told endless stories of street fighting in Berlin, just as on former leaves he

had told endless stories of the war. He described the surprise attack on the newspaper quarter in the same terms he had described the attack on the Belgian town of Maubeuge. After the sordid working day their eager interest comforted him.

Farmer Olsen sat hunched up in his usual seat – the man who had done Liese out of far too much land, land she now needed for clover. Olsen had been sent home in 1916 with a shot in the lungs, and the air of the country had practically cured him. 'I've had enough of all that "rot",' he now said. 'Can't understand how you fellows in Berlin still fall for it.'

'If the Reds came to Ruder,' said Nadler, 'they'd take away your last cow and your last bit of field just like they did in Russia.'

'No, no; no fool would do that here in this country. You just said yourself they'd take our last penny out of our pockets to pay for their war. But to do that you've got to have the rich on top and the poor down below.'

That made Nadler angry. He could not stand Farmer Olsen who sat there looking as squat as a radish, the most unsoldierly object in the world. Nadler would like to have banged the table with his fist. He even thought of breaking the lease just to get a rise out of the man and surprise the whole bunch of them. But it wouldn't do. He still had a glimmer of sense left; in fact, his rage had sobered him. If he were to break the lease now, they would have to have an extra man for the extra land. Then he would have to stay at home. And that he could not do. He had just signed up again. Things would soon begin to move and the army needed men like him. He could not come back home till the government was overthrown. Wilhelm firmly believed there would soon be a big revolution, after which life would be totally different from what one called life today – the dreary work in the fields, a government that took everything in taxes, the worry over Olsen and the lease, even the trouble about Liese. He did not know just how and by what means this would come about. He merely believed firmly that afterwards everything would be different. And when that happened he would have a place in the limelight.

Like all men, he believed that the war which was in their blood, the fury of blood and flame that had meant terrible suffering for some and terrible lust for others, could not peter out into nothing. It had to be the prologue to something more powerful still; something as different from the monotonous farmer's life as this world is from the next.

Then, instead of telling his stories, he began to sit there of an

evening, silent and brooding. No one offered any more free beers. Why should they treat this glum unresponsive man? As he tramped up the road to his farmhouse, he thought he heard doors slam inside. Quietly he stole into the room off the kitchen where Christian now slept. His brother lay rolled up in his blanket as if he were still lying in the trenches. He was snoring so heavily that the bed shook. Disappointed, yet relieved Wilhelm closed the door behind him gently. Then he moved on tiptoes into his own room. Nothing of Liese was visible above the covers but her knot of hair. It was evident that she had been asleep for some time; she was dead to the world.

IV

Every time the front door to the restaurant opened, Marie's heart beat like a trip-hammer. Even upstairs in her room, when she heard footsteps in the entrance hall below, she would sit, tense, motionless. The next moment she would be limp and pale again. Her heavy eyelashes, a shade darker than her hair, cast shadows on her lifeless little face that was as white as snow. One day, to put an end to this senseless waiting, not because she wanted to hurt Marie (she was too kindhearted for that), Luisa told her:

'I saw him on Sunday with another girl.'

Marie looked at her wide-eyed.

'They weren't just walking arm in arm,' Luise went on. 'They had their arms around each other and were holding hands.'

'That is not true,' said Marie quietly.

Luise was as angry as if she had really been telling the truth.

'You little idiot, do you really think a man wouldn't drop you? Well, more than one of them'll let you down one of these days. Since the war you can't count on a steady any more. The war gave 'em a hankering for change. You've just got to put him out of your mind, my girl, and take up with Number Two.'

Marie did not answer.

She could not explain to Luisa how different it all was with her. Luisa would never understand that two people could be meant for each other from the beginning, for ever and ever, in sickness and in health, in good days and bad, till death did them part. Even if for some reason or another her lover had suddenly stayed away, he could just as suddenly come back again.

Erwin had never told her where he spent his time when he was not with her. For her the right time began when he came in and closed the door behind him. She did not know that the last time he had been with her he had been on the point of explaining how he

spent his days. Martin had warned him against confidences: women, he said, even the best, were bound to have a close friend, less trustworthy perhaps, to whom they unburdened themselves. Their real life, Martin had added, in which to be sure love also played a part, could begin only after they had carried out their missions. Till then everything must remain unsettled, incomplete.

Marie never knew the meaning of happiness till she had lost it. Even when one is happiest there are always great moments of emptiness. Even held close in her lover's arms, the wall between them was still there, the wall that stood between them from the beginning. She did not study the calendar anxiously as most girls in her position would do. When she was sure she was pregnant, she gave notice and made ready to go to her Tante Emilie in Berlin.

'You poor little chickadee,' said Luisa. 'I hope she'll help you over the worst.'

Marie had not been to the city since the day she came to work in the restaurant. The intricate network of rails and wires seemed to entangle her, to hem her in. But she was much too weary to be astonished. Carefully she searched the faces for the one she longed to see. She had never dreamed there could be so many, many people. And all those miles and miles of streets and houses, a desert waste because nowhere could she find her friend.

She got out at the Belle Alliance Platz. The shop where Tante Emilie worked opened on to the same courtyard as her aunt's kitchen window. In this courtyard there was also a press, and the throbbing of the machines shook the walls in the surrounding houses. As she waited for her aunt, Marie could feel the vibration throughout her whole body, for she was as light and as thin as a leaf. She revelled in this sensation as though being shaken physically stilled the suffering in her heart. One of the girls called through the window on the court to Marie's aunt and told her someone was waiting for her. Tante Emilie, however, could not leave at the moment so she threw down the house key. Marie unlocked the door to the apartment which consisted of a living-room and a kitchen. Both rooms were filled with the things Emilie had owned together with her husband, who had been killed during the first year of the war: the bridal wreath under glass on the chest of drawers; his Iron Cross, photographs of Emilie and her husband when they were engaged and of her husband in his brand-new artillery uniform. The photographs hung on the walls among all sorts of chromos of which Emilie was particularly fond. She had never thought seriously of marrying again, though, with the money she earned, her vivacious temperament and her next

little figure, full-breasted and well-rounded behind, she had always had plenty of admirers. She had grown accustomed to living alone and supporting herself, to choosing her lovers and changing them as the mood dictated – a way of life which she described as loyalty to the dead departed. Marie forgot her troubles for a moment as she stood in front of the picture of a young boy with wings – not the usual picture of an angel to judge by the way he was gazing down at a young girl asleep at his feet. She came to herself with a start as the sirens shrieked in the courtyard.

The next moment her aunt came running up the stairs. Marie was showered with kisses, the veal chops were put to sizzle on the stove, questions rained like hailstones. 'The child of today is the woman of tomorrow,' thought Tante Emilie as she looked at her niece. Marie began her story quietly, almost drily, with no trace of embarrassment. Her aunt listened in silence, without interrupting. For Emilie had a way of listening attentively, making one understand by many noddings of her head, by her whole manner, in fact, that to her there was nothing new under the sun. Nor did she waste time in advice or commiseration, but went straight to the practical: Marie could board and lodge here with her. She would take the money out of her niece's earnings in small instalments; even the ten marks which she was going to lend her right away. The first thing Marie must do was to go to Frau Haenisch. As Marie was sent by Tante Emilie, Frau Haenisch certainly would not ask more than that. Haenisch had already done many a service for Tante Emilie. She was a good soul and reliable and she had a reception room just like a doctor's where you could rest. Everything would be as comfortable as possible, particularly as this was the first time for Marie. Tante Emilie looked upon Marie as a daughter for she had never had any children of her own.

Marie did not understand at first just what her aunt meant. When Tante Emilie saw that the girl hesitated to follow her advice, she was quite annoyed. 'Then go back to your mother in Pellwurm. And won't she be pleased to see her bright daughter? You wouldn't like that, would you? You ought to be glad you have someone to help you out of this mess!'

Marie spent the entire night thinking over her aunt's words. The next morning she went down to the Belle Alliance Platz and took a tram to Frau Haenisch's. From childhood she had been accustomed to following the advice of her elders. This time, on the tram, she did not search the faces of her fellow travellers. She knew now what she had to do. She took even less notice of the city about her than

she had the day before. If she had to go to Frau Haenisch, then it made no difference what the background of life was, a meadow or a city.

She had no appointment and another young girl was ahead of her. This girl immediately began to praise Frau Haenisch and in the next breath to curse the hardships of life. The girl was dressed in black, perhaps mourning. She had a great deal to say about the selfishness of men in general, and the particular selfishness of one man, who had first promised to marry her and had then deserted her and gone off to make fresh promises to a new girl.

'I bet that's what happened to you too,' she said as if her faithless lover were the root of all troubles, as the devil is of all evil.

A few minutes later Frau Haenisch came bustling in. She was as fat and motherly as a midwife who has already brought countless babies into the world. She asked Marie to be patient for another half hour. Marie heard water running two doors away. She heard children shouting in the courtyard; she heard motor-cars rushing past the house. This leather sofa on which she sat was probably the same on which she would later be allowed to rest, after the other girl had finished resting there. After it was all over, the girl had said, everything would be as it was before. 'You'll feel awful for a few days, then you can go back to work. And you ought to have sense enough now to keep out of trouble in future, but even if you do get into trouble again, well - you'll just have to get rid of it.' Suddenly the full realization of what she had let herself in for swept over Marie. She realized now what lay ahead of her if she did not go through with it. If she did not, nothing would be as it was before.

The half hour was almost up. Marie went over to the door and stood listening. Then silently she tiptoed across the room, opened the door and closed it gently behind her. Once out on the street she ran for the tram as if Frau Haenisch were trying to pull her back again.

Tante Emilie was surprised to find her niece so gay and lively that evening.

'For you young things it's all so much child's play,' she said. This was the moment when Marie should have told her of the decision she had made. She should also have returned the borrowed money. But having once disobeyed her aunt, she did not find it difficult to keep a secret from her.

On Monday she went to her aunt's workshop, where she proved to be a good worker, capable and easy to get along with, but shy at making friends with the other sewing girls. These girls were all

frequent visitors at Tante Emilie's, coming to ask her advice or to drink a cup of coffee. Nor did Emilie object if now and then they brought their boy-friends with them. She herself often had as guest a hairdresser from the Hedemanstrasse. He lent her his gramophone, and even managed to produce flour and sugar for the cakes and sandwiches Emilie was so clever at making. In this way her little home soon became a haven for the whole workshop. Marie laid the table and sliced the bread in what they used to call in the automat 'snacks'. She had learned all that in her restaurant. When the guests turned on the gramophone, Marie left the house and went to sit on one of the benches under the trees in the Belle Alliance Platz. Night began to fall. The silver sign over the nearest subway station looked like a half-moon floating on the night breeze.

Whenever Marie was alone she felt as if Erwin were sitting beside her on the bench. She saw his kind grey eyes turned towards her and almost felt the flash that lighted them. She even summoned courage enough to ask him where he went when he left her room.

One day Luisa came from the restaurant and Marie asked her whether she had seen him.

'Put him out of your head once and for all,' Luisa advised. 'You've made a nice life here for yourself it seems to me. Don't waste any more thoughts on that fellow. Wipe him off the slate.'

After Luisa's visit Marie gave up all hope, perhaps because her friend's words, harsh as they were, had struck home. But because dreams are the last thing we humans relinquish, she continued to live simultaneously on two planes. Actually she realized the hopelessness of waiting and calmly, dispassionately, she sought a way to avoid having this child. At the same time she also scanned the faces emerging from the subway onto the square in the hope that Erwin's face might be among them.

One day a nice-looking young man sat down on the bench beside her. He was a timekeeper for the subway trains. He always took the same train home. Marie began to like him better and better. Once in a while they would have a glass of beer or a cup of coffee together. Then, inevitably, one day he asked her to marry him. She had nothing against him, Marie told him, but she felt she must tell him that she was pregnant. The timekeeper assured her eagerly that he was a man of the world and very broadminded: he didn't ask a girl to wait for him, and anyway he wasn't so set on marrying a virgin. She could fix up everything before they were married - though he advised her not to mention the matter to his old mother. She was old-fashioned and still clung to the old principles. Marie

explained that she wanted to have her child. But the timekeeper said he hadn't any money for children now. In two or three years perhaps, when he got another raise in salary, he'd like well enough to have one - but one of his own. Marie did not reply. She walked the rest of the way home in silence.

Now and then she played with some of the children who tumbled about in the sandbox on the square. She knew three of them - two boys and a little girl. They were often accompanied by a woman with a squat, dumpy figure, who persisted in wearing short skirts and a short haircut. Marie soon learned that this woman was not their mother. Once she asked Marie to keep an eye on the children. Their father would soon be coming out of the subway. He was in the habit of leaving the children in her care while he looked for work; his old company where he had been foreman before the war had shut down. She was always one for giving her neighbours a helping hand. For that matter the children were nice little things. Their mother had died of influenza only a few weeks before the father came home from the war. It had been up to her, the neighbour, to look after the motherless little family. Everyone knew one seldom got any thanks for one's trouble. But who cares about that anyway?

Marie wiped their three little noses. She was much taken with one of the boys. He had alert brown eyes. Sometimes he would rush back to the bench to see whether Marie was still there. She would laugh at him and the boy would laugh too. The little sister never so much as looked at her; in fact she kept as far away from Marie's bench as possible. The little girl had a broad flat nose with enormous nostrils that looked like dark, angry eyes. The second brother was long and lanky with light blue eyes and pale yellow hair which made him appear even more colourless. But he was a wiry, lively little fellow. It was all the same to him who took his mother's place. A middle-aged man, with a round, shaved head, and wearing a field-grey tunic that still bore the straps from which his insignia had been removed, came up to the sandbox. He whistled to his children and took them home.

The fat neighbour soon got into the habit of leaving the children in Marie's care. Once she even gave Marie the key to the flat so that she could take the children home. The little flat was very shabby and neglected, though what furniture there was bore mute evidence that during the wife's lifetime the little home had been neat and orderly. Marie was enchanted with the balcony. She had never been on one in her life. Here too the flower-boxes looked be-

dragged. During the wife's lifetime they must have been a green hedge. Marie heated milk for the children, and while they were drinking it she plucked a few faded leaves and cut off the dead branches. Those that were still green she twisted through the balcony railing. The little girl came over and stood watching her - then quietly she began to help Marie. And while they were busy at this task the man came home.

After that Marie often took the children home. She heated their milk and cooked their supper. The man soon grew accustomed to her presence in the house. She cooked a regular dinner for him too. But, just as the neighbour had said, he never showed any inclination to thank her. He even seemed to expect Fate to provide someone to look after him and his family. Marie saw nothing wrong with that. Wasn't she expecting Fate to provide her with a decent job? At length after many weary weeks spent in hunting for work, the man found a temporary job in a ditch-digging company. Then the question arose as to what extent the Relief would look after his children. The fat neighbour was not to be depended upon. Marie was also just a bit of accidental luck and not a permanency.

After the children had gone to bed and she was alone with the man in the kitchen, Marie told him she was ready and willing to spend the rest of her life with him and the children. She would like to know how he felt about a second marriage. Geschke looked at her in astonishment. Marie lowered her eyes. The man stared intently at her face with the shadows of her long lashes sweeping her cheeks. So far he had always appeared glum and inarticulate. Now, all of a sudden, a soft light came into his eyes, the weight on his heart lifted as if the strange mingling of shyness and trust he glimpsed in the young face before him had, at the same time, relaxed his own tension.

'My dear child,' he said, 'I'd be lying if I tried to pretend that an offer like yours wasn't a godsend. If my dead wife had wings and could float above us and look down on us here through the kitchen roof, she'd certainly be glad I'd found someone to take care of her house and her three children. For someone of your own is better than all the Relief put together. But, my dear, I must ask you something. And you must tell me the truth. I'm not foolish enough to think you've fallen in love with me. I'm not that conceited. And I can't make out why a young girl like you wants to marry into a home like this . . . nothing but a lot of worry with a bunch of little kids, a ready-made family. And what's more, no regular pay packet. You'll have to count the pennies and put some by for the

month ahead in case the money runs out. Look here, I'm no fool and I'm not easily taken in either. If there's any reason behind all this, then out with it.'

He reminded Marie of her own father who worked on relief on the dykes in Pellwurm. Geschke was not so much younger than her father either. But what was to become of her if he would not let her stay?

'I'll be good to the children,' she promised eagerly. 'I'll make a new dress for the little girl – out of that curtain material you aren't using. I'll bake cakes every Sunday too. I promise to take good care of you all.'

Geschke felt a sudden stir of interest. Grief had numbed him, and, before that, the war. He had never taken any notice of this girl who came now and then to help out with his children. Now he saw how gentle and sweet she was. He said in a hoarse voice: 'You must tell me now what's happened to you. Why you want to crawl in here with us. I suppose you've done something you shouldn't. Come now, pull yourself together and let's have it. Maybe you've stolen something and are afraid they're after you, afraid it might come out. Is that it? I tell you again – I'm no fool. I could run into a fine mess that way.'

'I can't fool him any more than I could my father,' Marie thought; 'he'll send me away the minute he knows.' Aloud she said: 'I haven't done anything wrong. I've got nothing on my conscience.'

'All right, then,' said Geschke thoughtfully, but he did not take his eyes from her face. 'After all, there could be other reasons . . . maybe you've had bad luck in love and you don't care what happens now. So you think to yourself – it's all the same to me, now, Geschke or another.'

Marie frowned. And Geschke thought: 'That's it. I hit it right that time. Too bad! I'd like to have had a bit of luck for once in this rotten world . . . to come home at night and find this girl here. I'd have liked that.'

Marie thought: 'No, I can't fool him any more than I can my father. It was easy with Tante Emilie and Luisa. And that fat Frau Melzer, the neighbour, is the easiest one of all to fool . . . but I don't want to fool him. I don't want to fool anyone any more: it makes me sick.' She said bluntly:

'I'm going to have a baby.' And her eyes never wavered as she looked him squarely in the face. If he turns me out now, she thought, all right.

The man looked down at her in a sort of calm detachment, and the expression in his eyes was neither kind nor harsh.

'Why haven't you done something about it long before this?'
'I don't want to.'

His eyes met and held hers. 'Oh, so you wouldn't have said a word if I hadn't asked you? Later on, you'd have tried to make me believe the child was mine.'

Marie said softly: 'Perhaps.'

She clutched his sleeve. In a voice hoarse with fear and grief she begged: 'I'll promise to be just as good to your children as to my own. Maybe I'll even be harder on my own. And I'll never tell anyone, not the children or the neighbours. We'll keep it to ourselves, just between you and me.'

He said more gently: 'There's an old saying: Where there's plenty for three, there's plenty for four. To be sure you can also say: Where three are almost starving, four will be certain to. You haven't picked out an easy row to hoe there, but now that you've started to tell me the truth, don't hold anything back. We must start fresh. I'm not interested in details. I just want to know what sort of a man this was who gave you a child. One of ours or a rich man's son, perhaps in a house where you worked?'

'No,' cried Marie. Then, quickly, to get it over she added: 'He is dead.' The words struck her heart. She shuddered. She felt as if she herself had helped to kill him, as if those words made it impossible for her ever to see him again.

Geschke was still watching her. He held out his hand and ran his forefinger gently over her hair – the first ray of light in his house for so many, many years.

And with that gesture the future was as good as decided.

That evening they lingered longer than usual in the kitchen. Hesitatingly, in answer to Geschke's questions, Marie told him about her family in Pellwurm. Her home meant much to her. It was hard for her to talk of things that went deep with her. Then Tante Emilie's name came up and Geschke insisted upon inviting her. If they were going to be married, they must do it properly.

Instead of returning to her aunt's flat at once, Marie sat for a while on a bench in the Belle Alliance Platz. She wanted to be alone. In general she was relieved to have made the decision, but at the same time she was sad and thoughtful. Two or three impudent young boys spoke to her. She waved them impatiently away. The last person came out of the subway. The silver sign swung, deserted, in the spring night.

Geschke still sat alone in his kitchen. After all, the girl had stuck to the truth. He did not know much about girls, though he had often

heard from the talk of the men on the job that nowadays girls got rid of as many babies as their mothers used to bear. Marie must have been madly in love with the fellow. She was not just sweet and gentle – she had character too . . . and courage, if you could call anything courageous that did not take place under enemy fire. He could feel her brittle hair on his finger-tips. Strange as it seemed, he missed her already.

Tante Emilie was stunned by the news. She did not approve of Marie's marriage into a family with a lot of children. But it was impossible to talk sense into young girls these days. If her niece had really fallen in love with this man, then, after the visit to Frau Haenisch, she would have had a whole new life to look forward to.

Three

I

MARIE'S BREASTS and hips were so small that Geschke himself might have doubted her pregnancy and wondered just how much truth there was in her story. Though he would not admit it to himself, he had fallen deeply in love with her. He felt that it was somehow ridiculous for a man of his age, a slow-moving, morose fellow, crushed by war and hard work, to be so obsessed, for the first time in his life, by something outside himself – that silent little girl with the thick dark eyelashes and smooth bright hair that was just a shade lighter at the roots over the forehead. Never in his life had anything so sweet and so young run to him for shelter. Even as a young man he had not dreamed of such a girl. Geschke's imagination had never reached beyond reality.

He now had a temporary job running a truck for the subway construction company. Neglected for the four years of war, the subway was being repaired and extended. It was his job to run the building material from a depot within walking distance of his flat to the shaft. He was even inclined to ascribe to Marie this good luck in getting a relief job, as if it lay within her power to order his life as well as his home.

From scanty left-overs, Marie concocted the most amazing meals. Little by little the furniture, the linen, even the carpets, began to take on a new life. As a child at home her passion for cleanliness had often been the subject of much good-natured teasing. She had even been known to rush over to a neighbour's and begin washing her windows or stop a child on the street and plait her hair. She had hunted for a lost shoe-button as stubbornly as if it were a gold piece. Now with the same impetuosity she pounced upon tasks that to others would have been a burden. She repaid Geschke for giving her a home as eagerly as one repays a hostess for her hospitality. Within his four walls Marie found contentment because there she was going to be allowed to bring her child into the world. And this meant all the more to her because, so far, all the powers in the world seemed to have been in league to prevent its birth.

She was happy, Geschke thought. When, now and then, a shadow crossed her face, he thought she was worrying about the coming birth of the child – her first. He tried to comfort her – after all, it was the way every man had come into the world. At moments he realized that the memory of his first wife had faded and he felt a pang of remorse. She had been as glum and upright as he himself. To her the raising of children was a serious matter, whereas to Marie everything was as natural as if she were an older child playing with smaller ones. Franz, a cheeky little fellow, as thin as a rail, often stayed at home now instead of hanging round the markets or buildings under construction. Paul, the elder boy, was more openly affectionate than his father, who was shy about showing his emotions. The little girl had inherited her mother's gloomy disposition, but now even she had become devoted to her new mother. A brightness and a youthful gaiety had come over the three children as if they had been brought into the world again under more favourable stars.

Timidly Marie asked Geschke's permission to transform the old clothes-basket into a cradle. She was now so much a part of his life that he had almost forgotten that the expected child was not his own – the fourth to be born in his household. As for Marie, she had long ago given up all hope of seeing Erwin again. During the day, when she was alone in the flat, he would appear to her in a series of daydreams in which she ran after him, clasping their child in her arms. And, as if she had actually been unfaithful to Geschke, she would welcome him home from work more affectionately than ever to atone for the disloyalty of her dreams.

The other tenants in the house were amazed at Geschke's luck. Frau Melzer, the neighbour who had kept an eye on the children

after their mother's death, was positive there was something not quite right about this marriage. She was annoyed and tried to find reasons for her annoyance. It angered her that to Marie the burden she had assumed was no burden at all, not even a tiresome duty. Why, she even enjoyed the work that would have made another woman (and one not pregnant, either) grizzle and grumble. Besides anyone could see they weren't suited – that glum, elderly Geschke and that young girl! Frau Melzer kept nagging her husband, Gustav, for news. Before the war Melzer had been a tanner. Now he too was on relief work. In the old days he had often spent an evening with Geschke. His wife always had a chip on her shoulder; she was irritable and quick to anger, whereas Melzer had no desire to pry into his neighbour's private life. His thoughts ran on a higher plane: discoveries of new stars, the canals on Mars, conditions in the world today. On such subjects he had liked to hold forth to Geschke and Geschke had listened to him in silence. At first Melzer had scarcely been aware that Geschke had remarried. But later on he was as displeased as his wife because this happy marriage robbed him of his audience.

One evening when Geschke went into Lorenz's store, at the corner just across the street from his flat, to buy a bottle of beer to take home with him, his friends refused to let him go.

'Why don't you stay here with us for once? What d'ye mean by prowling about up there like an old tomcat?'

Geschke did not reply. He could see that Triebel, the tenant in the flat below, was waiting with twinkling eyes for his answer. The two men had fought together in the trenches. They now lived only two floors apart, but they never spoke to each other without quarrelling. Here at Lorenz's, thought Geschke, it would be rather nice to hang around and talk things over with the old crowd, even with Triebel. It was almost like being in the trenches.

However, he went back upstairs carrying the beer and he and Marie drank it together at supper. Marie was just as sweet and compliant as ever, but more silent. Geschke thought to himself: 'The fellows were right after all. Why shouldn't I go down there for a bit? The girl won't run away from me.' He looked at Marie as she sat there, big with child and languid. And for the first time the thought came to him: 'After all, I'm not to blame for her condition.' When he made an excuse to go out, Marie was relieved. Now she could go to bed and sleep.

Triebel still sat in the same place in front of the bar. The room had filled up around him. As Geschke pushed his way through the

crowd, he felt as if he had found something he had not even known he had lost. He was not a drinker, and he kept a firm grip on his cash balance, through employment and unemployment. But the atmosphere and the talk, now verging on the quarrelsome, gave him a sudden sense of elation. Ever since his return from the war he had lived himself as if he were locked up in his own skin. Now he felt like a traveller returning home after a long absence. He recognized old faces around him. He heard men arguing over the same names he might have heard mentioned abroad. In that period when he had withdrawn from harsh reality, immersed in his grief for his first wife and later in his happiness with Marie, all these changes had taken place: Ebert, he learned, had been elected President of the Reich – that same Ebert whom Triebel accused of being unwilling to depose the Kaiser and more inclined to train his guns on the proletariat than on uniforms with insignia. He learned too that the Spartakists now called themselves Communists. Geschke listened in silence, not daring to enter the conversation. In the days when they were in the trenches Triebel had been the same old trouble-maker. How many times he had landed in jug! God knows what might have become of him if it had not been for the armistice. He had always been too quick and too loud about expecting too much of everyone and everything – the armistice, for example. Now he jumped to his feet as if he were addressing the Workers' and Soldiers' Council; he sang the praises of the Soviet Union, the unknown land. Triebel was always a great fellow for praising to the skies events about which little was known or could be learned. His eyes glittered in his aboriginal skull. 'He looks like a jailbird,' Geschke thought, 'and he probably will be one of these days.' Young Lorenz, son of the owner, answered Triebel thoughtfully, as if he were the elder of the two. Geschke had seen more of Lorenz than he had of the others. At times the young man got under his skin: he came to the flat now and then to collect contributions for Schulze. He, Geschke, had always thrust his money at him quickly, as one shoves the same coins through the same ticket window at the same station, one day consumed with anxiety, the next filled with secret joy. Now this young man was saying casually to Triebel: 'If a fellow were to follow your advice we'd have the same chaos here as in Russia – murder and killings – and the Allies wouldn't stop at the Rhine. They'd come straight to the Spree, and that would be the end of the Reich. Ebert has saved us from that.' At this, Triebel turned on him furiously: 'By God, it would be a good thing to make an end to a Reich like this one!' Geschke was only half listening to the argu-

ment around him. Much of what the men were saying was new to him and much was such an old story that he was surprised they could still wrangle so hotly about the same things. So lost in thought was he that he began unconsciously to build a house of cards out of beer mats. Then he thought how unfair he had been to his first wife: for weeks now he had not even thought of her – always of this new girl. The quarrel came to a deadlock on a subject close to Geschke's innermost thoughts. He looked up as he heard the two names that had so often rung in his ears. It seemed incredible to him that this man and this woman who had set the whole city by the ears in the days before the war, and even when he was at the front, should have been murdered only last January. And now it was summer, scarcely six months later. In his numbed state the news of their deaths had made as little impression on him as the reports of their lives. The people, in panic fear, had carried into their very house the promises and demands their voices had clamoured for in the streets and squares. He had almost forgotten it. Here tonight those memories were on the point of boiling over just as they had done last January. Only a few days ago the woman's body had been fished out of the canal into which it had been flung after her death. The news had just leaked out; there had been only a few people at Liebknecht's funeral. Police orders had been too strict; there had been the parade of the military groups, the clubs, the arrests, and the spitting and jeering on the way to the cemetery. The waters of the Landwehr canal, that had covered the murdered woman's body for so long, gave a fresh opportunity for talking about that other miserable burial. A lot of people, said Triebel, stood on the curbstone that time and spat because they were secretly ashamed of not joining the procession, for between cowardice that kept them from following the funeral and spitting on those who did follow it there is less difference than one thinks. The man who is afraid to declare himself openly is always looking for a reason to despise those who have the courage of their convictions. By this time Triebel was well into his stride, relating with gusto the story he had repeated so many times. He told of the search for Liebknecht's body. It was known that he had been shot on the way to prison. Someone had been sent to the morgue – no sign of the dead man there. The messenger was sent back with orders to find the dead man at all costs. So he had put it up to the director of the morgue and hinted that there was another cellar below the regular one in which bodies lay on ice. So down he went and took a look round – and there was Liebknecht, on ice!

Geschke listened closely. It was the first time he had heard the story about the ice and he had his doubts about it. It made him shudder: the stiffness of death seemed stiffer; the government did strange things if you didn't watch every move they made. He made a mental note to go to this new burial. He was not a stranger in a strange city any more. This was his city; and his people were above such baseness. He wanted to prove this to Triebel – but it did not make him like Triebel any the better.

Marie was surprised when Geschke explained that he did not know whether he would get back from the cemetery in time – even if he rode back, it would take him at least three-quarters of an hour. She thought at first that he was going to visit his first wife's grave; perhaps this might even be the anniversary of her death. But when she heard the women on the stair corridor say that Rosa was to be buried today, she realized that Geschke and a number of his neighbours were off to another funeral – the other men would not have gone with him to the cemetery on his wife's anniversary. Moreover, Geschke's first wife's name had been Anna. Little by little she learned why the people were so worked up. Out there in her island home she had never known what was going on in the world, certainly not in Berlin. That same evening Lorenz came up to their flat and asked Geschke how he happened to get involved in going to this funeral.

Geschke thought: 'I don't have to take orders either from you or from Triebel. I've been here longer than either of you.' Aloud he said:

'Don't get excited. I'm the best judge of what I should and what I shouldn't do.'

Frau Melzer forgot all about her bad temper when, one morning, Geschke knocked on her door to ask her to come and clean his flat. Last night a newcomer had arrived in the world before he was expected. Frau Melzer rushed upstairs and began fussing around with diapers and coffee-mills and cooking-pots as if she could scrub her annoyance out of the utensils. The boy was certainly a big fellow for a premature baby she declared.

'He certainly is,' said Geschke. After all, Frau Melzer had known Marie when she was looking after the children on the Belle Alliance Platz. At that time he had never given a thought to the girl.

'You're a very sharp woman, Frau Melzer,' said Geschke.

In her desperate and fruitless curiosity, Frau Melzer was ready to gamble her all. It was strange, she remarked impudently, if this was

a premature birth, why the beds had been freshly made up, even the crib, the supper already cooked and the diapers folded – quite a coincidence indeed!

'That's the way coincidences are,' said Geschke. 'In Berlin they are always unexpected.'

Marie listened quietly, her head supported on her arm. She thought this man she had fallen in with was a good soul. She was pleased when Frau Melzer made a point of complimenting her on her milk and praised the baby's strength and greed. The neighbours came to look at the newborn child and at the same time, under Frau Melzer's expert guidance, to see what else there was in the room. Marie felt as if her child were all bruised by so many glances. Now as she held the strong and healthy baby in her arms and listened to the gossip and backbiting, she forgot her fear that she might lose him. He was here now. True, he had not been born in any palace, but there were certainly worse places than this on earth. She liked the quiet, middle-aged woman with her hair parted in the middle who nodded to her from the doorway and left a couple of eggs as a present. Annoyed by the gifts as well as by the woman's silence, Frau Melzer remarked that she was too old for her own husband, Triebel, who was a petticoat chaser; otherwise she wouldn't dare come to Geschke's – the two men were like cat and dog. Paul Melzer came out of his apartment on the same floor; he brought a horoscope with him and showed Marie the star under which her child had been born, the one it must beware of and the one it could count upon. His wife said:

'There, you see, Marie, how important it is whether you're born prematurely or not.'

Marie gave her a present of two eggs to calm her excitement about the stars. She was a little worried about what Tante Emilie would say. The money Tante Emilie had lent Marie for Frau Haenisch's services still lay hidden in a flower-pot.

Then Tante Emilie came rushing in, as gay as a lark in her short flowered dress. Emilie was no spoilport. Generously she admired Marie's rounded breasts, her silky hair. She allowed Frau Melzer to pour coffee for her – she was a great coffee-drinker and could take it at any hour of the day. And while the two women gossiped, Marie dozed off. Tante Emilie's voice sounded young and happy; Frau Melzer's, sharp.

She placed the basket with the child in it in a narrow ray of sunlight on the balcony that hung beneath the other balconies on

the outside of the house like a nest under a pile of other nests. From there one could hear people coming out of the centre of the city just as at home you could hear the rush of the tide on the shore. And, just as on the beach at high tide on her island, the walls and tramcars were touched by cloud shadows from the setting sun. In her homesickness Marie was overcome by despair lest she be lost here in this immense fullness as there in immense emptiness.

When Geschke came home from work and heard the child crying and smelt the wet diapers he thought to himself: 'There we are, another child again.' In another week Marie would be quite her old self. It is true he could not have said just how the original Marie had been, but he knew that life would go on in its old rhythm, a little fuller, a little more difficult, and that in time they would be thinking of the present fuller and more difficult life as the old one. The two boys were indifferent to their new brother. Helene, the gloomy daughter, was devoted to him because he did not tease her about her enormous nostrils and because he was soon taking his bottle from her as calmly as the breast from his mother.

Geschke had been sent to Lankwitz to get a load of wood. Early in the morning he had been obliged to take his truck to a repair shop, so that it was later than usual when he drove into his place in front of the yards. Afraid of losing his job through some piece of negligence he always worked at great tension. He drove round looking for a pair of new bolts which, for some reason or other, they had wanted at the yard; and he did not even stop when he saw the crowd gathered in front of a placard.

Two of his fellow workers were waiting in front of the wooden fence that enclosed the workshop and the parking space. These men had helped him unload yesterday. Now they ran towards him, their voices lost in the torrent of words that rushed at him from the crowd waiting at the entrance. All the men seemed to have gathered outside the yard, which looked enormous in its unusual emptiness. Fragments of shafts and wheels and spilt sand were all over the place. At first glance Geschke could not make out what they were. Most of the men had already seen the Kapp placards on hoardings around town. They had ripped them off and torn them to shreds, in obedience to the swift but invisible command. A very young boy with a fresh, beardless face and shining eyes turned on the tap close to the main entrance. He smiled as Moses might have smiled when he brought forth water from the rock for the thirsty. But this boy smiled because not a single trickle of water came out of the spout.

The miracle was all part of the general strike. Geschke stared at the tap as if he were holding back the water by the sheer tension of his own will. His lips were a thin line, his eyes narrowed as if he had put his whole being, every scrap of mind and muscle into the decision. Not only had the water ceased to function but the gas, the light and all the other necessary commodities of life, together with all those important thoughts that had kept stirring about in his mind up to this moment. As far as he was concerned his own life might well be a mess with or without the proclamation of these swine who nowadays dared to pose as government. But if they stood by, if they did nothing about it, they were lost irrevocably. He did not know who was right, Lorenz or Triebel. But this one thing he was sure of: If that gang of thugs stayed in the saddle there was no use breaking heads in the hope of bringing about a better life. What the whole rotten lot wanted was to get back to their palaces and ministries again and let the people sweat blood. What did they care that those same people had just been bled white in the war? Geschke felt an overpowering rage against this impudent, scoundrelly clique. He was ready to blow them to bits. He was even ready to let himself be blown up with them – the little life he had left was not worth saving. And the same furious rage swept over every man in the yard because each felt he was about to be cheated of his last fragment of hope of a decent life. Robbed of that hope, they were ready to blow up the spectre – if needs be to be blown up with it, for life was no longer worth living.

From the moment when Geschke drove post-haste to his job in fear of losing it to the moment when he decided to sacrifice his life for the thing that seemed paramount to him, there was just time for Marie to nurse her child. She put the baby down in the basket and started to finish her household chores. Out in the corridors and on the stairs women were talking excitedly and running up and down. Someone knocked on her door – Frau Mëlzer first, then others. They told Marie what had happened. At first she was bewildered, she did not understand: Kraemer had been shot and there was no use buying barley groats because even the gas had been turned off. Little by little other women began to crowd into her kitchen as they always did whenever a door stood open on the corridor. They sat about on the stairs as if the walls separating the families had burst asunder. One could hear shots now, not far away; a Kapp regiment was trying to force its way in the centre of the city. Marie was glad her baby was fast asleep. To her surprise Geschke sent a messenger to tell her to send his daughter to the yard with his knapsack. Helene was at home ill in bed. Marie got the girl out

of bed; before she had left, a boy who also worked in the car park came and filled the knapsack with bullets and the little girl ran off with him as if she knew at once what it was all about. When, a little later, Geschke sent another boy, Marie moved about silently, helping as best she could, though she knew only that these were orders. This boy had never been in the house before but he pulled out the kitchen drawer, broke open a cabinet and took away the gun Geschke had hidden there since the war. Marie had not dreamed there was a gun in the house. As if the general strike had forced its unwritten law on her too, she silently obeyed all the strange commands. The daughter, Helene, came back. Her face was burning with fever but she had to go back and find her brothers and take them to their father. The three children were to help him load bullets: the bullets would be used when the order came to stop the Kapp march. The children did not come home till late in the afternoon. Marie was worried about Geschke, but they did not know where he was. They stood about and watched enviously while their baby brother was fed from his mother's full breast: there was no warm food for them. Geschke did not come home that night. From the various rumours afloat it was evident that the attack of the White Guards had failed. Then came word that 'one of theirs' had died of his wounds, a quiet little man, father of a family, who had gone through the war from the first day to the last. Neither the Carpathians nor the Argonne were to be his grave, but the Rosethalerstrasse. A man little given to joining clubs or attending meetings, he much preferred to sit at home with his family. He had never been a Spartakist; no one had ever heard his name. That evening the talk was more of the dead man than of the living. No matter how much in the past they had fought and quarrelled and hated one another, tonight the dwellers in this tenement house were in passionate agreement. They could fight about the future again and quarrel about the fate of their country when they had driven out the gang in power.

Not till the next day did Geschke come home for a meal. Work began again. The kitchen cupboard stood open till evening when a boy brought back the gun for Geschke to put away in its old place. At the end of the war he had casually stowed it away for the time being - with his three little children to look after and his wife's death he had not had much time for reflection. He had never had any close friends and no one to whom to turn for advice. It was mere impulse that led him not to give up his trusty gun but to keep it beside him.

Marie thought to herself, a trifle hurt, that Geschke had kept back all sorts of things about which he never said a word. There were two vulnerable subjects in the flat: the clothes-basket in which her child lay and the floor under the kitchen cupboard where Geschke kept his gun. He was just as careful as she to avoid unpleasant topics.

'You never told me anything about it,' said Marie.

'Why should I?' asked Geschke.

II

Early in the morning Major von Malzahn, Wenzlow's neighbour, drove to Berlin with him – out of a sense of duty, as he explained to his wife. He took the young man to a little-frequented bar where they could talk things over undisturbed. The bar, however, was closed on account of the strike, neither waiters nor cooks having appeared. The subways were not running and they were obliged to walk to Councillor Spranger's in the Mommsenstrasse. Malzahn was confident of a warm welcome – he himself, old Spranger and Wenzlow's father who had been killed in the war had been friends from childhood.

At Councillor Spranger's they were recompensed for the breakfast they had failed to procure at the bar: there was plenty of gin, cherry cordial, Kümmel and brandy as well as old French cognac. Spranger laughingly explained that the glasses were covered with dust in order not to detract from the charm of their age. 'Your first duty,' Malzahn said, 'is to set this boy of ours straight. This young man is suffering from too much conscience because he was not standing beside Ludendorff at the Brandenburger Thor early this morning when the Erhardt Brigade came marching through.'

'Qualms of conscience are the privilege of youth,' replied Spranger still smiling. A glance at Wenzlow's scowling young face and he quickly changed his tone. 'And it is no less painful for us. That is, of course, the great conflict in the lives of men – when heart and reason pull in different directions.'

Young Wenzlow looked up at him with sudden, intent interest in his eyes.

Spranger had not sat on the bench for ten years for nothing. Many families in Berlin had reason to consider him surprisingly astute, as clever as a surgeon. Among the families of white-collar workers, even those employed at court, who had so far been his clients in difficult personal and business cases, he had shown the same qualities as a surgeon moving quietly from one operation to another. He was

an expert on film and press lawsuits and a specialist in certain politically 'arranged' suits that, in the old days, would have been carried as far as the Supreme Court, but which since the war and as the result of certain zealous machinations landed in the open courts. Young Wenzlow's calm, alert glance confirmed the opinion he had already formed of this son of his childhood's friend. As such, the young man was as close to him as any son of his own.

Before he said any more, Spranger offered his guests cigars, a brand that neither Malzahn on his pension nor Wenzlow on his lieutenant's pay ever bought in the ordinary way.

'My dear Fritz, as a matter of principle I take criminal cases that have some chance of success, no matter how small. If they didn't I would consider it cheating to send in my bill.

'Some time ago I told the gentlemen in question quite openly and plainly that I would have nothing to do with them, and, my dear boy, as that was also the opinion of other decent men, the gentlemen in question should certainly not have interfered. Very courageous, the events of this morning, very honourable, very worthy of respect. But - unfortunately - you cannot overthrow the German Reich with a little rioting. It takes more than that. Moreover, it is premature, it is lightminded. It is, in short, a mistake.'

Wenzlow sat motionless, except for the twitching of the muscles in his cheeks. Then he burst out with an excitement that showed only in his hoarse voice: 'Of course, Councillor, when a thing doesn't come off, it's always a mistake. Insufficient preparation, you can be sure, Herr Councillor. Therefore those of us who did not go along with them should be vindicated because we did not support a move destined from the first to failure. However, these moves are destined to failure simply because we do not back them. They are premature, because we did not rise at the right moment.'

The two older men were trying to convince the young man when the Councillor's wife entered the room. She carried a tray with sandwiches which she placed on the table. The two guests leapt to their feet and kissed her hand. She always brought the tray herself, she explained apologetically, because her husband could not bear to have a long-eared servant girl in his study. She also apologized for the dusty glasses - her husband insisted upon patina - and, with a glance, she invited them to see how clean the house was. The globe on the writing desk shone like an apple; the paper-weight - a little golden Mercury on a tiny earth-ball - all the desk fittings, gleamed like a doctor's instruments that have been treated with alcohol. The parquet floor was so highly polished that the Persian carpet

seemed to be swimming in a lake. The glass front of the bookcase, and even the glass protecting the life-sized photograph of their beautiful daughter in her wedding dress, positively glittered. The daughter had married a secretary of the Swedish Legation. The Councillor's wife had the fine figure and the warm charm of Swedish women. Even today it was obvious that in her youth she must have been far more beautiful than her daughter. She offered a third apology – this time for the burnt toast. Because of the strike all the bakeries were closed.

'You see, my boy,' said Spranger. 'Last week your comrade sat here on that very chair. He quarrelled furiously with me and swore it would never come to a general strike because Socialists and Spartakists had smashed each others' heads only a few months ago.'

Frau Spranger remarked as she left the room: 'Knives are foes one minute and friends the next.'

And Malzahn murmured as if to himself: 'Yes, if a Kapp or a Luettwitz could have kept their names off the proclamation, if we could have picked a man out of the masses, someone the people do not know yet and whom on that account they could still trust.'

'If, if, if,' said Spranger. At each 'if' he tapped the table with his middle finger on which he wore the ring of his student corps. 'If half the people mistrusted the other half more than they mistrust us . . . but things haven't reached that point yet. The war hasn't been over quite two years.' He turned suddenly to Wenzlow. 'My wife,' he said impulsively, 'often accused me of thinking as much of you as I do of our own boys. Malzahn is right when he warns you not to risk your future. We old men need your future.'

Malzahn smiled. 'You will still be young,' he said, 'when we shall have urgent need of you for a new Fatherland. By that time Spranger and I, to be frank, will have far too many white hairs.'

'We have them already,' said Spranger. 'Please don't frighten our young man by talking about the duration of time.' He laid his hand lightly over Wenzlow's – the young man's fingers lay close together. 'I can well understand that it is a dreadful thing for you to wait until a cause, condemned in advance, fails. All the more so when the purpose is of the best and it is backed by unquestionably good men. The trouble is they haven't patience enough.'

Spranger was a past-master at getting rid of visitors in the most charming manner. He now offered to send them home in his Swedish daughter's car. A Swedish coat-of-arms on the door, the mark of the consulate on the chauffeur's livery, would protect them from

any awkwardness arising out of the strike. As he led the way down to the car he remarked, laughing:

'Luckily, here in this country, no matter how many strikes we may have, the masses always have an ingrained respect for the symbols of power.'

That evening in Potsdam, in the Scharnhorststrasse, the conversation was repeated. This time, however, Malzahn held the floor while Wenzlow listened in silence. The position he had maintained a short time ago at Spranger's was now taken by the three women, the Malzahn mother and daughter and Tante Amalie. They had already been turning over in their minds the thought that the Kaiser would soon return from Amerongen to Berlin. Now, however, it was obvious that the President of the Reich, who had fled from Berlin at the first moment of alarm, was coming back to the palace again. From the way Tante Amalie pressed her lips closely together and sucked in her cheeks Wenzlow could tell that, in her heart, she was angry with him. He could read it in her face. That was just the way she had looked when she used to scold him for tearing his trousers, when he forgot to speak to someone. Now she was angry with him because he had not helped the rebels. To himself he thought: 'If you only knew what it cost me not to help?' The Malzahn girl plucked at his sleeve. She said softly: 'Don't worry. You certainly did the right thing. I always trust you.' He looked happily at her glowing young face. For the first time he noticed her breasts and realized that she was no longer a little girl. However, she was still much too young to make love to.

III

Klemm was away on a business trip when he received the code telegram giving specific orders to all officers still attached to the Freikorps. He promptly telephoned his house and asked for Becker to be sent immediately to Amoeneburg with his hand luggage. Because Herr von Klemm no longer needed him in the morning Becker had driven Frau von Klemm to her dressmaker in Wiesbaden. He had disliked Klemm's wife from the very first day because of her haughty manner towards him and particularly because she did not measure up to his idea of feminine beauty. As he frequently remarked in the kitchen, she was so bony you could hear her rattle. He was glad now to be able to say to her: 'Sorry, but Madam will have to take a taxi. Herr von Klemm has just ordered me to meet him in Amoeneburg.'

He was disappointed when Lenore urged: 'Then get along as fast as you can, Becker.'

Well, by God, she didn't have to tell him to hurry when Herr von Klemm needed him. During the course of the year the Herr Hauptmann had, in Becker's mind, assumed the stature of God.

Lenore had been expecting that summons. She knew where their journey led. The Red Army that had dug in in the Ruhr, right under the noses of the Allies, was a danger to all Germany. And the failure of the attempted *putsch* in Berlin had only served to make them more impudent. The situation of last winter, when Ebert had been obliged to call on the old officers because the Revolution was getting out of hand, had repeated itself. Once again the President was forced to seek the aid of the same men whose plans he had frustrated in the capital. The illicit Freikorps, the disbanded brigades, the retired generals – he was glad enough now that they had not yet disbanded and were not yet absolutely prohibited. Lenore pulled off the blouse the dressmaker had been trying on her. Becker, standing in the doorway, thought to himself: the hussy hasn't even enough modesty to wait till I'm outside. She doesn't think of me as a man. I'm just a chauffeur to her. To Klemm he had been, and still was, the war comrade.

Shortly afterwards he drove up to Klemm's office in Amoenburg with the luggage. On the way to Hoechst, Klemm became again the Herr Hauptmann – though his uniform still lay in his bag. They followed the usual route through Griesheim as they crossed the Occupied Zone, for the guards at that point were almost old acquaintances.

'First we must pick up our letters at Schluetebock's,' said Klemm.

Schluetebock was an I.G. Farben director and he lived in a beautiful villa on the slope of the Taunus. He was the middleman who passed on information between the Occupied and the Unoccupied Zones.

While Klemm studied the map to find the place to which he had been ordered, the Schluetebock servants entertained his chauffeur in the kitchen. Just as his master was an important figure wherever he went, so Becker had always commanded a certain esteem as the chauffeur of an important man. He was received by the servants of his master's friends in garages and kitchens with the same respect as his master in conference rooms and casinos.

After they had eaten, they drove through the night without stopping. Klemm warned Becker that they were now entering territory as dangerous as the territory they had crossed together at

the end of the war. Nothing could have pleased Becker more. At last he was rid of that senseless driving around with his master's wife, and he drove at such speed that faces flew past in the air like streaks. Crossing a railway line or a barrier he drew angry glances; mouths turned down at the corners as if he and his master, though they were still in mufti, were suspicious characters. They drove through a few industrial towns clustered around in fields before a large city. Now they ran into guards and patrols from the Reichswehr and the Brigades. Smiling, they called each other's attention to the torn Red posters, tatters of the agreement that had been broken last week: business control and Red Hundertschaften and the proclamation forbidding the Reichswehr to march into the town. The Red writing on the walls was scratched or smeared over with tar, and the officers who had been driven out of Berlin were leading their men through the town. Patrols from the Lichtschlag Freikorps and the Reichswehr strolled the narrow streets. There was no sound but the tramp of their heavy boots and the jingle of spurs, for all the men were still away fighting furiously for the words of the proclamation that were now nothing but shreds of paper.

Klemm had been ordered to join the staff of a Major Waldorf whose headquarters were in a requisitioned village school some way out of the city. The playground had become a bivouac. Two little girls with pigtails peered out of the gate, their round apple-checked faces open-mouthed in frightened surprise. They obviously could not resist the thrill of taking a peep at what – so their fathers and and mothers told them – was destroying everything they held dear. As Klemm jumped out of the car, the little girls ran off in terror. Becker accepted the offer of a drink in the canteen. Klemm reported to the officer in charge. Lucky he had got here at the right moment. He was to go to the village of R. and replace Hauptmann L., who had been taken to the hospital at Hagen. The village must be held till reinforcements could be brought up. If they arrived in time this stretch here would be cleared by morning. Klemm made a mental note of the *stretch* on the map and the pencilled arrow that indicated the reinforcements. He frowned. The brief post-war period was now a thing of the past. This was no longer a business matter: it was an order that subdivided into many equally important orders.

Klemm was so absorbed in his map that he gave a start when someone slapped him on the shoulder. He looked up into the handsome, good-natured face of his friend Lieven. As Klemm had to leave at once the two officers walked over to the playground together.

It turned out that Lieven was ordered to the same place. Becker came running out of the canteen. He gave a start, then laughed with delight as he recognized Lieven, who had been on several other trips with Herr von Klemm. Becker was glad to be driving them both again.

They left the town behind and drove from the plains into the hills. Lieven warned Becker that this was a favourite spot for all sorts of car traps, such as wires strung across the highroad. 'Only yesterday this region fell into our hands.' Trees and bushes were still leafless. They passed grey-green woods and a branch of the river dappled with March sunlight. The Reds had blown up the bridge, but there was already a pontoon. They drove by a farm that had been burned, and through a mob in village C., where the infuriated people had turned a woman over two cart-wheels and beaten her because she had spied for the workers. The factories had been commandeered and forced to work: their smoke wafted over a workers' settlement now as silent as a cemetery. This whole territory was in a state of siege as far as one could see in the direction of village R. It was as if they were in enemy territory, like the Ardennes or the Ukraine. They drove up hill and down hill through a couple of villages. Something hurtled through two of the car's windows and they could feel the wind whistle. The two men on the back seat got only a few glass splinters. When they reached their destination and Becker got out to open the door, he collapsed. He apologized. He was white in the face and could hardly stand upright. His coat was drenched with blood. The bullet that had shattered the panes had struck Becker, but he had gritted his teeth and held on, determined to drive his employer to his destination. Klemm put his arm round his chauffeur's shoulder and half carried him to the room, where they laid him on the bed. Later, as Becker was being bandaged, he came back to see how he was. They had a good laugh over their memories of the time in the war when Becker had been obliged to support his wounded master as Klemm had helped him today.

The wound was slight and Becker recovered quickly. When the Ruhr battle was over he was able to drive Herr von Klemm and Herr von Lieven back to Hoechst. They dropped Klemm at the Schluctebock house where, on the way to the Ruhr, he had stopped for his orders. Lieven accepted Klemm's invitation to go on to his house at Elteville for a rest. They lent him a passport to take him across the frontier.

Lenore was still in bed when she heard the sound of Klemm's

horn. She thought bitterly: 'The battles are over. They have beaten the Reds. And meantime what have I done? Taken care of his house.' Languidly she slipped on a morning dress, a grey silk in which she looked her slenderest, and twisted her hair into a knot which promptly came undone. Whistling, she ran down the stairs. The chauffeur, Becker, stood holding open the car door. But it was not Klemm getting out of the car. It was a stranger who introduced himself and bent to kiss her hand. He looked at her calmly, his eyes twinkling with amusement. Lieven was given the room in which Lenore's brother had slept. As they sat at breakfast together she looked every inch the well-dressed mistress of the house. A child, Lieven thought, who has carefully disguised herself as a housewife. But why had she cut her nails so badly? He liked to watch her grey eyes constantly change colour, and to induce that change he began to talk about the dangerous motor trip through the Red zone; the petrol filling station at the farm, the bullet that went through the two window-panes, the trusty Becker. They spent the late afternoon and the evening on the terrace overlooking the Rhine. Here and there a rift in the clouds gave the illusion of a second sky, the real sky, above. The light from this real sky broke through the rifts in the lower sky striking a distant farmhouse, the edge of a wood, a cornfield and a ferry boat.

The air on all sides rang with the sound of bugles from barracks where soldiers were standing to attention. From Mainz one could hear the band of the troop that always paraded at this hour. Slowly night crept over the sky, leaving only a red line of light in the west. This light glowed long after the plain on the left bank of the Rhine was dotted with lights and lanterns on barges and steamers cast their reflections in the water. Lieven talked of whatever came into his head. He had no lack of ideas - he had lived enough and read a great deal. Lenore hung on his words. He was a magician opening up new and dazzling vistas in her monotonous world. When his own experiences were exhausted, he filled in with those of strangers. When the stars began to come out, Lieven knew them all by name. Lenore had never heard anyone explain the constellations. She listened in amazement as if he himself had discovered the Pleiades and Cassiopeia. Lightly, as if the thought had just occurred to him, he said:

'The starry sky above me and in my heart the eternal law. The eternal law that led me out of the Russian prison camp, through all dangers, all the trickery of the Bolshevists to General Mannerheim in Finland and back to Germany in time to drive out the Spartakists

in the battle of the Ruhr and finally here. People do not meet by accident as some kindred souls like to imagine, but in cycles and under laws as eternal and immutable as the stars in Orion.' As he spoke, he placed his hand over hers. She raised her eyebrows as if she were wondering whether she should draw her hand away.

'You won't take it away,' Lieven thought. 'I'm certainly going to sleep with you even if I don't stay any longer than tomorrow. I shall make you remember me long after I have gone.'

To prolong this moment together, he went on to tell about the Reds who 'fled before us across the Rhine. It is against the law to cross into Occupied Territory. The next morning the Allies sent them back again. They are now in our hands, under lock and key.'

'I hope they have already been shot,' Lenore said. 'It would be a good lesson for the fellow travellers who fraternize with the enemy.' Now at last she drew her hand away. She went indoors to the nursery to look at her sleeping child and came back whistling.

'You look like one of the young women Dostoevski described,' Lieven told her. 'She was so slender you could wrap her around your hips.'

Lenore laughed. She had never heard of Dostoevski. Never in her circle had she met a man who knew books so well as Lieven. He told her of his childhood, spent partly on the Baltic estate of a relative, partly in the German-Russian school in St. Petersburg, now called Leningrad after the Bolshevik leader who had started the Revolution. There Lieven had stayed all those years without any people of his own. In situations like that a boy learned to make friends with books. Rodian Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov became his intimate friends. He explained what those two characters signified and promised to send her copies of the books.

The next morning they decided to lunch in Wiesbaden and they smiled at each other like good friends planning a conspiracy. Becker knew Lieven as a close friend of his master's. In their relationship with people of his class, both men struck exactly the right note of sharpness or friendliness that the occasion demanded. Becker detested gentlemen who talked down to a man, as much as he hated those who were always saying 'please'. Nevertheless he felt a trifle patronizing towards Klemm when he saw that Lieven's knee and Frau von Klemm's silk-covered one touched each other several times. No matter how superior these aristocrats might be, when it came to women and love they were subject to the same weaknesses as their inferiors - as Becker confirmed by a glance in the driving mirror. For some inexplicable reason, the housemaid Elsa had not

* been nearly so affectionate with him as before his trip. He felt a sudden sympathy with Klemm as he noticed Klemm's wife listening to Lieven's words, which Becker could not catch, with a secret, almost assenting smile and Lieven leaning so close to her that his hair touched her face. When they stopped in front of the Hotel Kaiserhof, Lieven did not forget to say: 'Now, Becker, get yourself plenty to eat and drink - as my guest, of course.'

At table Lieven and Frau von Klemm leaned together over the menu till their temples touched. Though Lenore had been poor in her youth, as Klemm's wife she had lost the habit of studying the price list, and Lieven was quite ready to squander the greater part of his pay on this tête-à-tête luncheon at the Kaiserhof. He had made up his mind, in the short time at his command, to effect a permanent and fundamental change in this young woman's life. Such an infringement on another's personality - whether that of a school friend or a girl - had always seemed to him a supreme proof of his power. The Lenore of today was already, inwardly and outwardly, a far different Lenore from the woman he had seen on his arrival.

They were the only German couple in the dining-room, which gradually filled up with a number of French officers and their companions. Lieven had learnt French at his school in St. Petersburg. Two lieutenants at the next table decided that the two were definitely Germans but obviously of good family. Lieven translated: 'They would like to know how good a German woman is at making love.' Lenore blushed all over her pale face. The French lieutenants remarked that this girl was not in the least like the native type in these parts, who all had plump cheeks and plump breasts. The war, they thought, agreed with a lot of girls. It had made them less anæmic. Lieven got up, an expression of disgust on his face. They ordered coffee and cigarettes served in the winter garden.

Becker, meantime, was not at all sorry to be obliged to wait. His new love from the hotel waited with him in the car. He showed her proudly the latest fittings lacquered in beige to match the body of the car. He told her how he had saved his employer's life five times in the war, in Berlin, on the Ruhr. The new love, a chambermaid from the hotel, listened in awe. When Lieven finally appeared with Frau von Klemm, Becker and the girl looked at them searchingly.

The next morning Lieven ordered the chauffeur to drive them at an early hour to the Bierstaedter Höhe for breakfast. Both Lieven and Frau von Klemm kept strictly to their own corners as if they were afraid to touch each other. In the glass, Becker saw Lieven watching Frau Klemm out of the corner of his eye. She stared

straight ahead. The March day was warm enough to breakfast out of doors; afterwards they wandered around on the meadows and later filled the vase in the car with violets they had picked. Becker was told to take the day off as they had decided to take a long walk. He could certainly do with a free day now and then. He was to fetch them in the evening at the Kaiserhof. Lieven gave his orders with a light, friendly smile in his eyes, a sympathetic reminder of the many dangerous days he and Becker had spent together.

Becker was at the Kaiserhof at eight o'clock. He was anxious to see his hotel maid. At home Elsa puzzled him more than ever. The little girl at the Kaiserhof let him put his hand inside her blouse, but swore she wasn't standing any nonsense from those French beasts. She told him his employers had had a good day themselves.

'On a walk?'

'Walk! I don't think. They rented room seventy-eight with bath on the third floor facing the park.'

Becker had never liked haughty young Frau von Klemm and he was quick to express his disgust. Of course it was only human that his beloved employer should have bad luck in love once in his life. In such matters there is no difference between chauffeur and master. On the way home he glanced in the mirror at the two faces reflected in the glare of the headlights. Lieven's handsome, well-cut mask was as cool and bold as it had been in that same mirror during many a dangerous moment of the past weeks. The woman was paler than usual and grave. Neither of them exchanged a word.

Becker said nothing in the kitchen because he thought such gossip womanish and a reflection on the good name of the house. For his own part he kept a sharp eye on the couple. But there was nothing more to observe.

The next morning early he was summoned to Mainz, where Klemm was waiting for him at the station. Becker had taken a liking to Lieven because of his dash and the way he had of treating the chauffeur like a comrade. But when he saw Klemm's face at the station, he said to himself that, like all women, Klemm's wife did not know the best when she saw it. He made a firm mental note not to mention his suspicions for, after all, the affair at the Kaiserhof was only woman's gossip. He was afraid that men of this class might be too quick to shoot, and also that he might not be able to convince Klemm that his wife's folly was not worth a quarrel between two such men. However, he could not suppress a slight feeling of triumph, a brief moment of superiority, as Klemm greeted him.

On the way home he was glad that he had said nothing and he almost forgot the unpleasant affair. Even Lieven seemed to have forgotten it, for he welcomed the master of the house with genuine pleasure. That evening he left. Klemm found that his wife wavered as usual between ill-bred silence and sudden, inexplicable outbursts. Several times she asked whether Lieven had not sent a book. A book? To Klemm's amusement, she chattered volubly about a certain book by a certain Russian.

Klemm told her one day that Lieven had taken over a commando in Silesia. He was fighting with the Poles there. Lenore went to the nursery and locked herself in. Now it was clear to her why Lieven had not written. It was equally clear that he was never coming back. She became as placid as she had been before his arrival. The sudden outbursts of tenderness that had at first seemed to Klemm charming and surprising and later odd, ceased entirely. She submitted to her husband's embraces, quietly, indifferently.

IV

Liese was scouring the kitchen floor. She had planned a general house-cleaning for Saturday. Christian was busy sweeping the courtyard, hobbling about instead of swinging his leg in a circle with every step. The shouts of the children, the cows lowing in the barn, served merely to emphasize the quiet of that tranquil morning, as calm and lovely as only peace can be. Liese and Christian laughed at each other from the courtyard and the kitchen when they came upon some forgotten trophy in a corner. All that medley of useless things was bound up with pleasant or amusing memories. Here, for instance, a piece of glass, there a hairpin, and once even a piece of money they had looked for frantically to give the grocer.

A shadow fell across the doorway. Liese gave a start as she caught sight of her husband. She took hold of herself at once and began to chatter gaily:

'Good Lord - what a surprise! I didn't think you'd get here till tomorrow. That's why I was trying to get the place straightened up for Sunday. But it's fine you could come today.'

Nadler did not reply. He looked exhausted. He was so tired that he flung himself right down in his tracks on the kitchen floor still wet from washing. If Liese was surprised she thought it unnecessary to pay any attention. She laughed and joked and began sweeping round him. Wilhelm Nadler sat there as if he had been sitting in heaven only knows what - puddles of water on all sorts of floors.

He leaned his head against the cold stove; his eyes closed. Underneath his eyelids he could see the broad stripes of his wife's apron; all the pictures that raced through his mind were striped too: the advance on the Tempelhofer Field, the time they waited on the outskirts of the city ready to be rushed up as reinforcements when they got the order. The usual rumours had escaped through when the last detachment failed to come up. And at last, instead of the order they were hoping for, they heard that the fighting in Berlin was all over, that no reinforcements were needed. Then came the wretched retreat of part of the brigade and their scattering into single groups of fugitives. His Hauptmann had ordered everyone who had any chance of going underground to leave the regiment; he himself would stay with the nucleus of the men. When Hauptmann Degenhardt ordered Nadler to go, he thought his heart was broken. No good-bye to any family could have hit him harder. And now this was his homecoming, seen behind the wretched blue stripes of Liese's silly kitchen apron. Why hadn't he had the luck to be killed in the general strike?

Liese ran out into the courtyard to whisper to Christian: 'Something's gone wrong with him! Don't let him set eyes on you!'

Christian was half angry, half amused. He thought: 'He's certain to have been with the Kapp outfit. They say the whole gang was there.'

Wilhelm Nadler pulled off his heavy boots. He had already discarded his uniform on the way here in order to slip into the village without a fight. He hurled the boots into the middle of the kitchen. Liese picked them up and stood them casually side by side. There was still some smoked ham left from the winter provisions. She cut a slice for her husband, ladled out a plate of soup for him and sliced some bread. 'Eat, eat, you're hungry.'

He wolfed the food down greedily as if the grief in his soul had changed into hunger. Far otherwise had been his mental picture of his final homecoming: enough pay in his pockets to hire a boy or even several boys and day labourers and he himself, if he chanced to be at home, respectfully greeted and warmly welcomed as master of his estate. He had seen himself like Freiherr von Baschwitz on the other side of the lake, walking about in riding-boots, overreaching his farm. Now, when everything had gone to the devil, he remembered at last how different his return should have been. Before that his one idea had been to march into Berlin and chase the Red gangsters to hell. He had thought too of the Fatherland as something above

and beyond himself. A man risks his life only for something dearer to him than the life he has known. He had been drunk on the visions and the words that had overwhelmed him since the war. Why on just those visions, just those words? Because they had promised him something that had been dear to him from childhood: Power and glory. Glory to him that meant open recognition, envy, admiration, a bemedalled glory. Power he knew was his in a greater degree than all the hired boys and day labourers and farmers put together. That power was far removed from the power and glory the pastors drivelled about, from glory to God in the highest, and the power and the glory out of the Lord's Prayer. What did God get out of an honour that was vague and illusory? What good did all his omnipotence do him up there in the sky as long as he was invisible? Now power and glory had vanished for himself and for the Fatherland. The gangsters who drew up the Treaty of Versailles - they were the fellows on top now. And those same men, with their red armbands, had torn off his decorations and Iron Crosses when he came home from the war. At that point it occurred to him that probably even that gentleman in the War Ministry, to whom his captain was going to put in a good word for him, could not get to the top. Like a drowning man, Wilhelm Nadler heard in the lowing of the cows, in the sound of the broom on the bricks in the yard, in the cries of the children, only his own tormented and debt-ridden life beating about his ears.

With his forearm he shoved his empty plate so far from him that it fell to the floor and broke. Liese picked up the pieces. Nadler flung himself down on the bed. 'Come here!' he called. Liese protested, it wasn't time to go to bed yet. Nadler shouted: 'Come here, I said.' He grabbed her furiously and shook her as if she were to blame for everything.

Later she told Christian: 'Just keep out of his way.'

Christian thought to himself it might not be a bad idea for them both to get out of the way of his infuriated brother. But he also reminded himself that his brother was, after all, the owner of the farm and had obviously come home to stay. This final homecoming brought no happiness to anyone on the farm. It brought none to Liese, who would rather sleep with Christian, who was gentle and kind to her; none to Christian, who certainly could not expect anything good from his elder brother, and least of all to Wilhelm, who was there violently against his will. Christian was intelligent enough to realize what had happened to his brother. At least he knew a way out for himself: he was enough of a peasant not to set much store on

dreams, but rather on pursuits that would get him somewhere. During his father's lifetime he had learnt the shoemaking trade. In those days the prospect of sitting still on a bench his whole life long had not interested him. But his father had insisted that the youngest son must learn a trade because the farm would not be enough to feed them all. Meantime his father had died, and a third brother had been killed at the front. Christian himself had been wounded and invalided out before the war was over. He had been mending shoes for friends and relatives for years now. The best thing for him to do would be to set up for himself; then he would also be left in peace. He hated to give Liese up to that he-goat, but Liese herself had long since known there was nothing else to do. She could not let the farm go to rack and ruin, and, with the farm, her children. Neither could Christian, with his crippled leg, hobble away from it, with her or alone.

They were all tied together to this piece of land, by family ties and by their very situation. Each brother, secretly and in his own way, longed to shake off the family and to leave the farm. But for neither was this wish ever to be granted. Christian Nadler was not interested in patriotism, or in the Reds – he was not interested in anything. All he wanted was to find a little corner for his workshop where people would leave him in peace.

Four

I

AFTER ALL, his homecoming turned out not to be so gloomy as Wilhelm Nadler feared. He had forgotten how exciting his wife could be: there was much to be said for a woman who was young and strong in bed and who worked like a man all day long in the fields and took a proper pride in their common property. Here, too, Nadler was among his own sort of people; here at last he ranked as a man of greater experience than the majority, not only during the war but in the post-war years. Twice a week the innkeeper put his parlour at the disposal of a certain group of favoured clients from

the scattered villages on the moors and along the lake, who met in his inn. Nadler felt very important as he strolled past the ordinary drinkers who stared curiously as he went into the back room where his friends gathered on the innkeeper's good carpet, instead of in the taproom floor among the oak roots, to express their opinions of the uncertain state of the world. He began to take an interest in the attitude of the village and finally managed to stir the little hamlet from its lethargy. As chosen leader of his particular group, Nadler decreed that full honours should be paid to those who fell in the war. People wondered what went on in the parlour when, on war anniversaries, the group drank toasts and cheered so lustily you could hear them in the village street. They wondered why they held a memorial service on the anniversary of the Versailles Peace Treaty and a secret celebration when Erzberger, the signer of the Treaty, was murdered. The tavern clients stole into the parlour to gaze at the caricature of Erzberger, cut from the *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung*, which hung on the wall. Even the village pastor, Moebius, slipped in secretly; he detested the Jesuit Erzberger. To be sure he did not approve of Christians celebrating the murder, but he had to laugh at the drawing.

The head of the *Vaterländischen Vereins* of the country men who had fought in the war went every month to the hotel on the lake where the owners of villas and estates held their meetings, secret in their way too and celebrated with wine instead of beer, under the leadership of Herr von Ziesen. That gentleman was now living with his family on his estate on the other side of the lake. He frequently drove his own car into Berlin to the *Allgemeine Deutsche* meetings. Nadler was completely captivated by Herr von Ziesen. Sensing that Nadler was trustworthy, von Ziesen gave the former soldier various important instructions and listened earnestly to Nadler's reports. Nadler began unconsciously to imitate Ziesen's gestures and witty remarks; he even began to look like him, just as before he had copied the expressions and manners of his Captain Degenhardt.

Liese was glad not to have her husband at home every day: it gave her some peace from his amorous attentions. But she stuck to her decision not to encourage Christian. She had enough with looking after her husband at home and keeping him out of trouble, seeing that he did not get involved in a war or an adventure that would relieve him of his household responsibilities. She talked him out of schemes that would lead him into communication with soldiers, the remnants of the Ehrhardt Brigade that had gone underground somewhere in

Silesia, or the Black Reichswehr in the casemates of Berlin. She made him promise not to join them in any of the parts of the country where fighting was still going on, at least not until the fate of their own part of the country was decided.

Christian began to look about for new loves. Handicapped by his lameness and the fact that he lived in the country, this was not a simple matter. However, he was chiefly concerned with ways and means of making a success of his cobbler's trade. He had knocked at door after door in the village to announce his intention of taking up shoemaking again provided he could get enough work. Then, silent and depressed, he would wait for some time to see what would happen. Then as nothing happened, beyond a few words of encouragement, he would hobble dejectedly away. The most hard-boiled farmers were among the last to be moved by the expression in his eyes which were neither pitiful nor weak, but as hard and ugly a blue as their own. Then they remembered that this young fellow had lost his health in the war and deserved a shoe shop. One day they were surprised to see him hobble into church. The pastor's wife and her three big daughters noticed the wounded soldier who dragged his left leg along with both hands. On Monday the second daughter brought him a pair of shoes to be soled. The old original shoemaker cursed the vile hypocrite, for, after that, Christian never missed a sermon. To Christian's delight, Pastor Moebius had a large family - there was also a son from Berlin who came on visits and several grandchildren who were conveniently hard on shoe-leather. This pastor kept as firm a control over his congregation as a sergeant over his men in barracks. Sometimes a car or a motor-boat fetched him for a visit to the Ziesens. The ladies of the house also appeared on Sunday mornings if Moebius was going to preach a special sermon. In the hotel by the lake, as well as in the Ziesen household, there was much praise for his sermon on the Rathenau murder. 'The Scriptures,' Moebius had declared, 'tell of a Jew who accompanied the cart on which the Chosen People carried the Ark of the Covenant. The holy cart was drawn by oxen; for the Chosen People were a race of farmers and they used oxen for ploughing, even as you, my sons and daughters. But once when those oxen stumbled, the man grabbed at the Ark of the Covenant fearing it might fall. There was a great flash of lightning and the man fell dead. Why did the lightning strike, my sons and daughters? Was it not brave of the Jew to try to save the Ark of the Covenant?' The pastor paused to increase the suspense of his congregation. Then, in a slightly more emphatic tone, he went on: 'Holy Writ gives the

death of this man as an example of one who seeks to assume undue importance.'

The congregation took a deep breath. The people in the back rows could not see that the Ziesen family in the front row were smiling. Christian Nadler, sitting in the back row, did not smile because he never smiled. Moreover, he did not care who shot whom. He knew what the pastor was referring to. He had read in the paper that two young boys in a car had shot and killed Minister Rathenau - a queer stroke of lightning, that! But he looked straight at the pastor with his innocent blue eyes to show him that he was paying strict attention - Pastor Moebius needed new soles to his shoes just as much as other human beings.

Now that Christian was separated from his family, living and sleeping in his little shack, he earned enough for his everyday wants. Each month he saved his pension money. So many years had passed since the armistice that he had amassed quite a tidy little sum. Timidly, as if he feared to offend his brother, he offered to lend Wilhelm money. And he added, with a sort of hangdog embarrassment, that he had nothing else to do with it. The lessee himself was in a bad way: it was plain that he was insisting upon being repaid because he owed even the sum due him for the use of his threshing-machine, having been unable to pay the rent and the charge for threshing when they were due.

About this time farming began to look up. A Berlin hotel-owner sent to the village to buy provisions direct instead of waiting for delivery in the city markets. He ordered the entire apple harvest for October. One evening Wilhelm Nadler came home from a trip in high spirits, bringing with him a stranger, a half-grown boy whom he had picked up on the way. He introduced him as his day labourer, because they had to get the apples picked in a hurry. The boy looked extremely young for the job. He was terribly thin and, though in his last year at school, had managed to get excused for the harvest. His father had been killed in the war; his mother, his eldest sister and his brother-in-law worked in the cement factory beyond the lake. His mother was so hard-up she had had to send her son out as a day labourer, making the farmer promise to pay him in produce. Because the mark was still uncertain the pay was to be reckoned in bread, eggs, and grain. In this way the whole family gained something solid that would not slip through their fingers like the weekly pay from the cement factory. In addition the boy was to have his meals at the farm as long as he stayed with Nadler.

Paul Strobel was stronger than he looked. Wilhelm worked him

so hard that he was often too tired to eat. Nadler's own boys, accustomed to the work as they were, stared in surprise when the strange boy failed to scrape his plate. Paul's ears stuck out from his head; he had round, merry eyes and beautiful strong white teeth. At home he had been warned to hold his tongue so as not to get into trouble with the farmer before the harvest was in. Wilhelm Nadler took great pride in the fact that he had someone working for him, even if it was only a shabby little farmhand and a temporary one at that.

'That brother of yours is a slyboots,' the boy said as he sat with Christian in his workshop.

Christian was amused: 'Well, you won't have to put up with him much longer.'

The boy answered with more fire than he dared to show in the kitchen where he swallowed his food and his employers' remarks in silence. 'I get out of school at Easter. Then I want to go to Berlin. I'm going there to learn welding.'

'Take care! It won't be easy for you there, either.'

'Yes, but only eight hours at the most. After that I'm free.'

Christian made no reply. As long as he could remember he had heard farmers curse the foolish demands of the Berlin workers, their impudent laziness and their eight-hour day - as if a fellow could knock off milking or mowing after eight hours' work. He himself had offered to resole the boy's ragged shoes at night before he went home, because the boy had to wear them all day long. He said:

'You wouldn't get your new soles if I stuck to an eight-hour day.'

'Oh, rot,' said the boy. There was nothing he liked better than to sit in this lame Nadler's workshop. There he was aware of something he missed at the farm, for, like all boys of his age, he was quick to detect the things that meant something to him. On this farm the only person who would give him what he wanted was the silent Christian in his workshop behind the stable. 'Now, listen: it's decent of you, of course, but among ourselves we all do that for each other.'

Christian made no reply. He liked the boy. He was sorry when he went off with his knapsack filled, according to the agreement, and not a gramme over. And what an extraordinary jumble of youthful nonsense - never before heard in the village - that boy had left with him; a strange collection of ideas gathered, presumably, in the cement factory. Like all cobblers, Christian had time to pursue his thoughts as he hammered away at his shoes.

Wilhelm soon came to his brother for help again. First it was the

rent; then fodder; then the cow. Now it was time to think about the plan Liese had been dinning in his ears for so long. Of course Wilhelm must first put all his farm equipment in order; but the other farmers would certainly gape with surprise when he added to the number of his cattle. If Christian could lend him money once, thought Wilhelm, he could lend him some again. This Christian did of his own accord. Just as the haggling about the cow reached a climax, he came limping into the kitchen from the barn.

'The Jew is asking me so much,' Wilhelm cried, 'I won't have enough money to buy the cow, even if I throw in the apple-money from the hotel man.'

Christian nodded; he made a few attempts to slip out of the room unseen. He stole a glance at the cattle-dealer. The man sat there with both hands in his bulging coat pockets and his lower lip thrust out, refusing to come down on his price. Christian offered to stand security for his brother in case the latter failed to meet the rates agreed. The old Shylock was surprised. He had never known such generosity among either Jews or Christians. However, if Christian gave his word in writing, it was all right with him. It was even more than all right with Wilhelm. When, some time later, Christian went to his brother and humbly implied that he felt under an obligation to him for giving him the stable as a workshop, Wilhelm was overcome by his own generosity in accepting the offer of Christian's money.

Liese was once again with child; this time her husband's without any doubt. Sometimes when she tended the cows in the morning she could hear Christian limping around in his part of the stable which was separated from the other by a wooden fence. She could hear him pull out the bench, begin hammering on a boot. He always kept aloof from the family. Once only he called to her:

'Hey, Liese, bring the kid out here!'

When she heard that she walked straight into his workshop. A swift glance assured her that after all he was not so badly off: the pile of shoes lying there to be resoled and mended would bring in a good sum, in addition to his invalid's pension which in itself was enough to keep him going.

'Which one?' she asked.

Christian looked up from the shoe he was nailing. He said, slowly: 'The boy, of course. I'd like to see him close to again.'

The woman sat down on a box. 'What would you do with the baby among all these boots here?'

Christian did not reply. The woman still sat there, swinging her

legs in spite of her large stomach and even pursing her lips in a whistle. Christian gave her a swift glance. Then he bent his head over his work. The woman waited, whistling softly, till Christian said:

'You needn't be afraid, Liese. Such a foolish thought would never enter my head now. A woman like you would never sleep with a man like me.'

Liese answered with laughing eyes:

'All right. If you're so bent and determined to have a look at the little fellow, I'll run over and get him. Today for the first time he has to go and work in the potato field. He's old enough now.'

Liese went back into the house and, after making sure that her husband had gone off with the older boys, she picked up the child who was pulling straws out of a brook while he waited for her. In the workshop the child began to play with pieces of leather. Christian did not say a word. He just went on hammering, apparently paying no attention to either of them.

Now that Wilhelm owned a cow, he began here and there to make small improvements on his farm. He went to Berlin.

'Look here, Christian,' he said, 'you might just as well fill up a paper for me like the one you filled up for Levi. You know - that you Christian, will be responsible for your brother Wilhelm's debts. Just in case I find something worth while and haven't enough money with me.'

Christian lowered his eyes as if he feared his glance might be too blue and too keen. His expression was almost humble. To himself he thought that such a security, clear proof before any German court of the amount his brother owed him, might not be at all a bad idea. It might indeed be the best thing that could happen to him. There was not only the matter of the savings from his pension; there was also his inheritance. If the brothers did not divide the land, Christian would have a certain sum which he could use for learning his trade and for putting his workshop in order, as well as a sum he could count on for keeping him in his old age. Christian liked to have such matters down in black and white, once and for all. What Wilhelm did not know would not hurt him. Wilhelm paid little attention to the words Christian scribbled on paper. The principal thing was that by putting his signature and Christian's to the document he could get a few pieces of machinery on the instalment plan. Nor did it occur to Christian to demand his money back when, later, Wilhelm sold his poultry, his young pigs, and even the remainder of his potatoes to the Berlin purveyor at a high profit.

Though it was clear to Lenore that Lieven was never coming back, she could not refrain from waiting and watching daily for the post. The servants soon began to notice that the *Gnädige Frau* stood at the corner window on the staircase twice daily and waited for the postman. As far away as the village of Elteville that worthy might have glimpsed the motionless white face at the window, dry-eyed from watching, that followed him for a mile as he trotted across the field with his mailbag. The letters were always business letters for Herr von Klemm or letters from friends who still kept in touch with their comrades on the other side of the demarcation line, though cautiously and surreptitiously for fear of the foreign Occupation troops. Klemm, meanwhile, had gathered together men from his own factories, employees and engineers as well as individual workmen and had organized community meetings which appeared on the company lists as 'Rhineland Comrades'. These meetings had programmes and objectives identical with those of similar groups in far-off German cities. It did not take long for the people at Elteville and in the village to discover what sort of letters Klemm was receiving: it was a simple matter to question the postman in the evenings at the tavern.

Lenore had never seen Lieven's handwriting. Once a letter she had addressed to him was returned. In her desperate loneliness, which she did not understand and which she found unbearable, she had swallowed her pride and tried to wring some sign of life from him. Keeping her tone purposely light, she had asked for the books he had recommended. The letter was returned 'Addressee Unknown'. Like a ghost, stealthily, he had come into her life and vanished, leaving behind him nothing but a few strange ideas, some amazing quotations, the titles of several books and memories of his carcases. How big and uncouth Klemm seemed to her now! His courage and his jokes had become platitudes. When he took her in his arms, she yielded indifferently, her arms hanging at her side. Klemm once remarked to his cousin - the cousin without a 'von' to his name, who had replaced him in the business and whom Klemm had eased out with an almost brotherly frankness - that Lenore was one of those women who promise everything before marriage, but afterwards bestow all their tenderness on their children. This explained those sudden outbursts of hers that had surprised him in the field hospital and had almost dismayed him on his first visit home.

One day at table he happened to mention that his friend, Ernst Lieven, had made quite a name for himself in the Polish revolt. Lenore turned a little paler than usual. As with women who are naturally pale, her face seemed to glow brighter from within, and her grey eyes were almost radiant. On evenings when the Rhineland Comrades met, Klemm was pleased to note the interest with which his wife performed her duties as hostess, a task to which she was usually indifferent. The men brought their wives and sweethearts to hear Klemm talk, and Lenore soon became famous for her generous hospitality. The women huddled together in groups, drinking tea, sipping wine and eating cakes. Even Becker was ordered to appear at the meeting. Klemm made it clear that every comrade, no matter what his station in life, was welcome. This meeting was a demonstration against the idiotic Marxist nonsense about class distinctions. Becker was particularly pleased when Klemm told his wife to pour out tea for the chauffeur. Klemm emphasized the importance of keeping alive, here among the people of the Rhineland, the feeling of unity, of German *Lebensraum*. It was particularly important here, in the extreme west of the Reich, that they should hear the story of the Polish rebellion and of the timely and determined intervention of the German Freikorps on the Far Eastern front where Germany was once more the superior power. He pinned a little flag to a point on the map over his writing desk. The Anna Berg in Silesia, which the German battalion had stormed, should be as familiar to them as the Feldberg in the Taunus. The enemy had caught Germany in a pincers movement from East and West. In the East the pincers had closed in Silesia and here in the West on the Rhine. The sanctions under which they were suffering ever since the London Conference had the same objective as the plebiscite in Upper Silesia. There the pincers were supposed to snip off a piece for the Poles; here on an absurd pretext the Allies had occupied Duisberg and were seeking an excuse to take over the Ruhr. The mines in the Ruhr and in Silesia were the wealth of the land, the very marrow of its bones.

After the guests had left and Becker was polishing the car in the garage, Lenore went up again to her husband's study. Klemm sat at his writing-desk, with his back to her. Lenore studied the map, looking for the little flag which, she imagined, marked Lieven's position. She even dared to ask casually:

'Where did you say our troops are now?'

Klemm answered at random:

'Back in Germany, of course. They've lost in Poland through votes and treaties what they won with blood.' And he added as if answer-

ing his wife's unspoken question: 'Even Lieven is supposed to be sitting somewhere or other in East Prussia. A few decent people there have opened their estates to what's left of the division.'

Half an hour later as Klemm was being driven to Amoenburg, his chauffeur turned his head.

'If Herr von Klemm will allow me to say so, Herr von Klemm made a fine rousing speech this afternoon.'

'So you liked it, did you, Becker? Many an old friend of yours and mine was up to his neck in that Upper Silesian mess. Lieutenant Lieven was wounded there. You surely remember him.'

'Indeed I do, sir,' said Becker. He was proud that Klemm had said 'old friends of yours and mine'. He was also proud of the knowledge that he carried the happiness of his employer's family safely locked in his breast. But he could not repress a feeling of satisfaction that, whether Klemm knew about his wife's adventure or not, he was sure to get just what he deserved. Becker himself had driven Klemm after conferences to various houses in Wiesbaden or Frankfurt. On the way home Klemm would always slip some money into his chauffeur's hand.

'If anyone asks you where we were . . . ?'

And Becker, smiling, would reply: 'In conference with Herr Schlutebock.'

That same week Becker was to learn that a situation he had considered simple enough in his own class contained a hidden sting. After making up his quarrel with Elsa, he had taken their engagement for granted though, so far, he had managed to avoid the customary marriage offer. To be sure, he had often boasted at meals in the kitchen that only soldiers on active duty knew the meaning of absolute fidelity, but his Elsa had never appeared to be offended. Hadn't she let him kiss her as much as he pleased and hadn't she even visited him in his garden room? Now, all of a sudden, here she was weeping bitterly in the kitchen and running out of the room every time he appeared. The servants sniggered. He noticed that the girl was wearing a kerchief bound around her head as if she had a headache.

'Do you wear that thing on your head in bed at night?' the gardener asked.

The next thing he knew was that Elsa had turned prudish and would not let Becker touch her. When, however, he caught her off guard and grabbed her hard round the neck, the cloth fell off her head. Her heavy knot of hair was gone. Weeping, she explained

that on her way home from a dance she had been set upon by a group of ruffians who had cut off her hair because, they pretended, she had been dancing with a Frenchman. But the Frenchman had merely spoken to her on the way. She had walked as fast as she could. In his impudent French way he had flung his arm around her waist. Someone had seen him and instead of giving the Frenchman the beating he deserved, they had called her a French whore. Then they had lain in wait for her in the village – probably a couple of fellows who were jealous because she hadn't danced enough with them. They just wanted to get their own back and to make her the scandal of the village. Becker, she knew, would have given those fellows what for.

Becker stared at her coldly. 'I don't like it, my girl.'

When she tried to put her arms round him, he shoved his knee in her stomach and pushed her away.

Now, seeing her there in the kitchen, he declared roughly:

'No one can expect us to sit down at the table with a French whore.' And he added, as if he were Herr von Klemm himself: 'Pack your things and get out of here.'

Elsa was stunned, too bewildered to defend herself. She had never dreamt that her fleeting love affair with the French Occupation soldier could have such results.

The house personnel was at first curious, then delighted, at the unreserved approval with which Herr and Frau von Klemm stood behind their chauffeur's autocratic decision. The kitchen particularly commended the *Gnädige Frau* for upholding the two men, her own and the chauffeur, in this matter. Everyone agreed that Elsa was not the right sort of person for the Klemm household. In Occupied Zones a German household must be above reproach. Moreover the village youth who had cut off Elsa's hair was a member of Klemm's Rhineland Comrades group. The little kitchen-maid switched her thick plaits impudently and proudly as if to say there was no need to cut off *her* hair.

Klemm could not avoid holding a conference between German and French experts in his own home. For days afterwards a sweetish foreign odour of a strange pomade, the billeting smell familiar to all Rhinelanders, pervaded the house: it clung to the car upholstery even when, after driving the Frenchmen back, Becker dropped his employer in Amoenburg. For the first time in his life Becker was in low spirits. Secretly he missed the girl he had treated so harshly; and every foreign garrison, every French accent, every strange perfume reminded him of Elsa's depravity.

The remnant of the division with which Lieven had fought in Upper Silesia was now quartered on the estate of the von Gleim family, who had opened their doors to officers and men. There was, however, a limit to their hospitality. Host and guests both understood that the sojourn was merely for an intermediate period which sooner or later must come to an end. Just as the survivors of the World War – wounded, despairing, crippled and spiritually shattered – had been unable to believe that a new form of government, treaties and sanctions could solve their problems, so now after this recent fighting, which had once more cost much blood, no man believed that a few statesmen could settle the world's difficulties without their aid. The last word still remained to be said though: the youth of several countries had been bled white. In Hungary, to be sure, the people had long since put an end to the Reds, but red flags waved threateningly over countless troop gatherings in countless cities. Even in Paris and London, the children of working men scratched the new sign of the hammer and sickle on their frozen window-panes. The youthful Soviet Power had repulsed the invasion: once again it had proved that young nations do not become weaker but stronger on account of inner convulsions. Budenny's march on Warsaw had roused all the capitals of Europe; if the Red Guards, barefoot and in tatters, could come so far, who knew how far they might go in the West? When the Red Army was stopped in front of Warsaw, some men gave a sigh of relief; others choked back a sob. The new Polish Government had issued its demands. The German Freikorps had fought against the insurgents. And now all those lives, all that spilled blood, were suddenly to become mere matter for treaties as bloodless as newspaper articles.

No one had any faith in paper decisions. That doubt was shared by all men, no matter how little else they had in common. All awaited the final true decision, which could only be steeped in blood. Some believed that their own lives would be different only if the whole world was changed from its foundation, upwards; others that their own lives could be transformed only by the resurrection of a German Reich, powerful and feared as before. A hallowed Reich, it had once been called. To be a citizen of the Holy Reich of the German People would atone for every sacrifice.

Lieven's division was quartered in a sort of barracks village that had been hastily organized for that purpose. It lay some distance nearer the railway station than the manor house. The station was

at Kattowitz, a little village of a few hundred farmers. Young Gleim had served in the Freikorps after his demobilization. As the result of a series of unexpected deaths, he had suddenly found himself heir to this vast estate. If there were really any danger of revolution, the garrison on his land would be a bulwark against the invasion of the Red hordes which Gleim imagined sweeping over the land like a tornado, or like the Mongols and Tartars in the Middle Ages. Meantime, during the harvest and as forced labour, the troops would be good ballast against the flood of foreign and native farmhands.

The officers lived in a wing of the main house, a mansion of many rooms leading out of a large hall whose french windows opened on the garden. This wing had formerly been the main building itself. In those days architects ran riot with curves and scrolls after the example of Frederick the Great at Potsdam and Sans Souci. The long front with its bow windows, the middle one of which stood open between two Corinthian columns, was a delicate touch of useless fantasy in the distant, shimmering, mirage-like wilderness. So thought Lieven as he entered the house by way of the garden instead of through the main entrance on the shorter side. He had borrowed from young Gleim various old pieces of furniture – spinets, clocks and card tables – for the main hall. Now, as he came into the long hall where his friends sat playing cards, reading or drinking, he was greeted with shouts and cheers. He carried his arm in a sling. He almost felt as if he were coming home, for he had a talent for leaving the mark of his personality wherever he happened to be.

At his suggestion they were giving a party today for Gleim and his family and for those of the neighbouring estate-owners. The officers were paying the expenses of the party themselves. Though Gleim provided their food and lodging, the estate did not bring him in sufficient income to keep them in pocket-money as well. The extra money came from the Reich, from various national groups conscious of the need to keep this Freikorps on a war footing. Lieven inspected the flowers, the table decorations and the various preparations which had been carried out according to his directions. His comrades were delighted at the prospect of dancing with a few pretty women. As there was still an hour before the party began, Lieven excused himself. That gaily decorated hall filled him with a sense of intolerable boredom. He had known these families for weeks; he knew what each would say, how each would look. His friends behaved as if they expected some sort of magic from this party.

But there was no such magic: there were no such exciting parties. Danger, thought Lieven, is the only magic that transforms men. That and nothing else is what makes them appear different. Life with all these fellows was bearable during the war; in the Baltic, in the Ruhr or in Poland. Now their bones were beginning to creak like old furniture. Out of the whole lot, he was probably the one who had most need of Gleim's generous hospitality, since he had neither home nor family. But he found the life of this remote estate, surrounded by all the too familiar faces of his comrades, almost unbearable.

Sounds reached him that showed the party was getting under way – Luettgens's favourite song, laughter, the honking of motor horns. He mounted his horse with the help of his orderly, hampered as he was by his wounded arm. As he rode off the lights and shadows in the windows looked quite festive. It was possible to forget how boring individuals are, he thought. Those men had been companions in battle, then in destiny; now they were companions in boredom.

He rode towards the village and, dismounting, went into the bar near the station and sat down. It was one of the dreariest bars he had ever seen. In a little while two farmers carrying sacks came in. They stared at Lieven over their beers and, putting their heads together, obviously discussed him. Then in came a man Lieven knew – Schubhut, the Gleim's bailiff. The man inquired about Lieven's arm. Though he sat down at the same table, Lieven decided not to open the conversation, but to wait and see what this man would talk about.

'I'm here to meet my daughter. She's been at school in Stettin. My wife died in the war. It's no life for the girl with her old man of a father.' The man's eyes, in his rough bearded soldier's countenance, looked very young, almost radiant. 'Excuse me, please, Herr Leutnant, I'd rather wait on the platform. Perhaps you'll keep an eye on my package here.'

Lieven watched him hurry out of the door. 'What's the old fellow so excited about?' he wondered. 'He's quite beside himself today.'

The train pulled in, discharged a few passengers and pulled out again. 'Aha! Now I understand,' thought Lieven as Schubhut came into the bar with his daughter. She was fifteen or sixteen years old. 'Too bad,' thought Lieven, 'there's no Baedeker of beauty to tell you where to find the girls with the best figures. Athens certainly hasn't the monopoly: East Prussian railway stations are by no means out of the running.'

The girl had long, slender legs, prominent little breasts and amazingly thick plaits that hung down on either side of her head. Everything about her seemed to acquire a peculiar charm from the mere fact of being hers; the way her hair was parted in the middle, the red and blue flowered dress she was wearing.

'I just have to deliver my package to the up-train,' said Schubhut. 'I'll leave my girl here with you a few minutes.'

The girl looked calmly at Lieven. Her eyes were as bright and shining as her father's. Lieven gave her a long, steady look, but she seemed no more disturbed by his long silence than by his staring, which she appeared not to notice.

'When I was a little boy,' Lieven said, 'I once had a book of fairy-tales that someone must surely have given you too - Grimm's fairy-tales. In it is the story of a girl who was locked up in a tower by an old witch. The girl put out her head and let her lover climb up to her at night on her two long plaits.'

'Ouch!' cried the girl. 'That must have hurt!'

'I don't think so. The plaits were as long and as thick as yours. For years I carried a mental picture of the girl with the plaits. I think I have always had a longing for her.'

'Did you ever find anyone like her?'

'Three minutes ago. I've stopped looking for her now.'

She tossed her plaits behind her head, but not before he had seized one and wrapped it so quickly around his wrist that she was forced to bend her head. When she had freed herself, she flung both plaits over her shoulder.

'What's the matter with your hand?' she asked.

'I was shot in the arm on the way back from our forward posts. We had laid a mine to blow up Polish headquarters. But you know most of that from your father. They took us all in here when we had to get out of the country.'

'Why did you have to get out?'

'Because of a false plebiscite. The Inter-Allied Commission gave the land to the Poles.'

He began to tell the story, rapidly and brilliantly. Amazing incidents, observations and events crowded into his mind as if, in addition to his own life, he had lived many others. That was what always happened when something he particularly wanted came within his grasp.

Schubhut came back to the bar. His joy at seeing his daughter again showed in the way his eyes crinkled at the corners. The wagon was waiting outside. After he had stowed away all his packages and

his daughter, he picked up the reins. Lieven mounted and rode beside them. After five months of being away at school, the girl wanted to drive and changed places with her father. When they reached the bend where the field road led away from the main road, Lieven should have turned off. He could already hear the sound of carriages and motor-cars depositing guests in front of the distant manor house. But he rode on beside the wagon as far as the bailiff's cottage. What a picture it all made: the yellow brown of his horse's mane; the earth, flat to the horizon; the streaks of red in the evening sky; the girl's head flung back, her plaits swinging at her sides. The faint sound of music greeting the arriving guests added to the enchantment. What, only a short time before, had seemed a desolate waste, was now a stage set for the girl's homecoming.

They drew up in front of the bailiff's cottage. Green shutters and hedge roses – the picture was complete. Lieven helped to unharness the horses. The housekeeper had prepared coffee and cakes to welcome the girl home. She offered Lieven a plate. Schubhut was pleased and proud because the most important guest at the manor was obviously attracted by his daughter's pretty face. As for Lieven, he felt out of place at the table, an intruder on the girl's cool, calm youth – until Schubhut moved the table into the corner to make room for dancing. The waltz Luetgens was playing over at the manor house for the guests came through the flowered curtains into the room faintly lighted by the fringed lamp. The girl glanced up at him for a moment and the lamplight shone on her eyes and teeth. 'Tomorrow she can wait for me,' thought Lieven. 'This is enough for today.' He picked her up under her arms, like a child, and set her down on her father's knee. Schubhut had sat there biting his pipe and watching them dance. He was proud of the attention his daughter was getting and amused by the whole thing.

Ten minutes later, Lieven entered the hall where his brother-officers were entertaining their guests. He was scolded good-naturedly for making them wait for him. The moment he came in the party took on new life, like a dying fire on which someone throws a fresh log. Lieven recognized the waltz again. He was aware of women's faces and bare shoulders. The women were perhaps very beautiful, perhaps very ugly. The spell that accompanies being in love distilled itself in Lieven's words and glances; each of the thirsty guests longed to drink at that mysterious spring whose source they could not guess. Gleim, slender and modest, introduced Lieven to several friends. He was proud of Lieven's

brilliant and provocative talk that gave his guests something to think about.

Their host seized this opportunity to arrange for a meeting the following morning. Only a few of the guests were going that night; the majority were staying for the week-end in the great main house. Gleim's father-in-law, the Ministerial Councillor, had a great deal to say. His speech was as carefully ordered as his convictions - introduction, main body, and peroration. Lieven looked from one face to the other, and he thought to himself: 'These are all friends and we share the same opinions. I am a guest here. The Ministerial Councillor is Gleim's future father-in-law.' He was conscious in every part of his body of the girl waiting for him. She must have been standing at her bedroom window a long time watching the path through the fields.

The next afternoon, when he entered the bailiff's parlour, he saw on her face traces of the change he had sensed. Her calm that, only the day before had seemed to him impenetrable, was already shattered.

The old man left them alone and went off to ride over to the farmhands' settlement. The workers had complained because the colony of several thousand soldiers, quartered there for the harvest, would bring their wages down. Gleim told the bailiff to explain to them that only a strip of waste land was to be used as a settlement for the homeless soldiers.

When the bailiff returned, his guest was sitting in the same chair. His daughter had run upstairs to tidy her hair. Later she came back with her sewing and sat down on the edge of the circle of lamplight. The father rambled on about the way he had spent his afternoon. He wondered whether these frontier guards and Oberland men really ought to settle here. How long would they stay? Sooner or later the Korps would be on its own feet. Some of the same rumours Lieven had heard that morning had seeped into the bailiff's thick head. Even the word 'revolution' was mentioned again. What did Schubhut think that meant? Lieven wondered. What would he get out of it? A better salary, perhaps, than Gleim was in a position to pay him. No more trouble with his workers who would have to keep their mouths shut about wages. As he said good-bye, Lieven turned his back on the father and once more quickly grasped the girl's plait.

They arranged to meet in a hollow behind the mill. He thought at first he would just forget all about it. She would get over it, after the first disappointment, and he could keep her in his memory as

she had first appeared to him – the youngest and loveliest thing he had ever seen. Yes, but the loveliest was already a little less lovely; the youngest a little older. He could not separate himself from her life now. Better therefore to keep the appointment. She came, walking firmly and deliberately on her long legs and, at a distance, before he saw her face, he thought she looked proud and calm. Her linen dress was cool and fresh; later on, to his regret, crumpled. Afterwards he kept smoothing it flat, while the girl loosened her hair and plaited it.

In the days that followed he was there once before the time, once later than she expected him. He stood and watched as she came towards him with that straight, upright carriage. When he was late, he saw her eyes feverish with anxiety and noted the way she was pulling up the grass about her. He took a gramophone to her house. The housekeeper served excellent meals for the guest. Sometime Schubhut would ask: 'Well, when do you go to war again?' The girl waited, frowning, for Lieven's casual reply: 'No sign of it yet.' Nor was there much evidence here of the inflation about which guests from other parts of the country told such hair-raising tales. Everything the housekeeper brought to the table was grown on the estate.

Suddenly he stopped going there.

The old man asked his daughter: 'Where's he hiding himself? Have you had a quarrel with him?'

The girl shook her head. This was a puzzle she could not solve.

In the officers' wing at the manor house little Luettgens asked:

'I say, Lieven, has the little Schubhut given you the cold shoulder? You ought to have seen her dancing yesterday.'

'Good,' said Lieven.

And Luettgens added: 'You sound as though you've fallen in love at last. Not with the fiancée, I hope?' That was what they called Gleim's future wife, the daughter of the Ministerial Councillor. She was a quick-witted girl and smartly dressed for the times. Lieven lay awake in his bed. He had long since lost interest in the girl. But deep within him he could feel her endless waiting was more alluring to him than any caresses. He overheard someone say that old Schubhut was almost out of his mind because his daughter had suddenly gone wild. She never missed a party: whenever there was dancing, even down among the foreign fieldhands, she was always there.

Once he met the girl in a group of rough village boys. She flung him a quick glance that was meant to be bold, but managed only to be despairing. That cut Lieven to the heart, an organ he had long

since thought of as dead. He began to pay such marked attention to the 'fiancée' that Gleim was relieved when Lieven announced his impending departure. There had been quite a few departures from the guest wing during the course of the year. Some of the men had wanted to see their families again, at least for a time. A few had gone to Berlin to find a post in the remnants of divisions that might soon be called into action again. As always in such cases, many of the men would have liked to sit it out on the Gleim estate until the army died of its own accord. They could not realize that they were lost and forgotten. They were waiting for orders to march on the Rhine or into Silesia.

At that moment, luckily, the elder Lieven invited his cousin to the farm he had rented with borrowed money, several hours' journey from the Baltic. The serious wound he had received in the fighting in East Prussia was fairly well healed; he was still the head of the family even though there was no family left. Lieven wrote that he would come as soon as possible. He also wrote - which was not quite the truth - that he was looking forward eagerly to seeing his only relative again.

IV

Through the efforts of her Tante Emilie, Marie was able to get work at home. The shop in the courtyard supplied weekly a firm which forwarded its deliveries from various shops to a large department store. After numerous negotiations with the firm, the department store had finally arranged for payment at the dollar rate and the owner of the small shops brought pressure on the firm to establish this adjustment. The women, working in the courtyard, idled away their time till they were paid in full, staying out one or two days or at least one or two hours. During this brief period inflation shot sky-high. If a woman waited for her husband to come home with his pay and he was late so that she could not go to the baker till the next morning, the money for a loaf of bread would buy only a couple of rolls. The Sunday roast melted to a cutlet. What had been the price of good meat became, with the new rate of marks, a few pounds of bones fit only for soup or for the children to gnaw on.

By sewing a few hundred buttons for her aunt or a few yards of braiding, Marie earned her marks sooner than her husband. She could wait in the courtyard for her pay and run straight to the butcher or baker before Geschke, whose job was now some distance away, was home again. Sometimes she worked at night so that

Emilie could give her the money for bread and milk early the next morning.

It was fortunate indeed for the sewing-women that Emilie was so good at getting on with all sorts of men. She was as friendly with the buyer for the firm, who only turned up every now and then but was always genial and full of fun, as with the owner of the shops, a surly, morose fellow. She had a responsible position and no girl whom she took under her wing was ever dismissed. When Marie came back from the grocer's, almost in tears because the price of coffee had gone up so high overnight that she had not been able to buy any for Sunday, Tante Emilie was there to comfort her. No one understood any more what the figures on the paper notes meant. In times past millions and billions were words used in connection with astronomical bodies and the omnipotence of God. Now the same figures appeared on dirty brown paper in the earthly sphere.

Geschke had carefully hidden away his dead wife's savings-book. He himself could never understand how her patiently accumulated savings had risen to a hundred marks. Perhaps while he was in the trenches and she was ill, or perhaps when she came down with influenza and knew she was about to die, she had scrubbed stairs in a boarding-house for the last time to earn a little more and bring the total up to a round hundred. He wondered whether pride in her surprising legacy had comforted her as she lay dying; whether she had thought that at least this trace of her would be left for her husband and children. That this sum had now vanished in a few days was a greater blow to Geschke than the crash of the great banks. He shoved the little book, now completely valueless, into his breast pocket. He could never bring himself to do what old Bensch on the ground floor did in his scorn and despair – take his money out of the savings bank and then, because it was worthless, hang it on the hook in the privy.

Marie struggled now to feed the children as their dead mother had struggled in her time. If her boy was to have enough to eat, then Geschke's three, Paul, Franz and Helene, must have just as much. She had named her little son Hans after her own father – both grandfathers happened to have been Hans too. When he was born she had hesitated to suggest the name Erwin, because in her home it was customary to name the newborn child after the dead. She shrank from cutting an extra piece of bread for her boy or from secretly slipping him sugar behind the backs of his brothers and sister. He was now so thin that his shoulder blades stuck through his shirt. Because he was only skin and bones, his little foxlike face

looked sharper than ever: he had a cleft in his chin and two bumps on his forehead just like her lover. When he was angry or when he laughed, the same sparks flashed in his grey eyes. He was happiest when he was as far away from her as possible, running round with the second boy, Franz, watching houses being built. She wished he were more like his elder stepbrother Paul, who was content to sit with her in the kitchen and play with buttons.

At their meagre evening meal Geschke often thought: 'If she could have known what was coming, she probably would not have been so set on having the baby.' Then, as if the thought were unworthy and the child innocent of events in the world, he would take little Hans on his knee or swing him in the air. Marie was not so pretty now as she had been; the years had been harder on her than illness or the birth of her child. But there was still a golden sheen on her forehead and at the roots of her hair. When Geschke looked in at Kraemer's shop, and saw that golden hair among all the heads bent over their sewing, he was glad that so much light belonged to his life.

One evening, when Geschke was out and the children asleep, Tante Emilie came upstairs. She shut the door stealthily behind her and tiptoed over to the table where Marie stood ironing. Her outstretched neck, her glittering eyes showed plainly that she had something important to tell.

'Marie, a man came to see me and asked about you. I've no idea how he got my address. He was awfully persistent. I told him you were bringing your eight dozen buttonholes to my flat early tomorrow morning.'

Marie said hoarsely: 'When he talks he winks one eye. He has a scar in his hair to the left of his eyebrow. He is fair.'

'Yes, fair, so he is,' said Emilie. 'I didn't notice about the scar. And I didn't pay any attention to whether he winked an eye.'

Marie lay awake all night. She had always known that Erwin would come back to her if he were not lying in his grave. Her constant cry must have reached him. It should have been possible for her to wait for him. Perhaps of late she had not waited quite so steadfastly as one should wait for the dearest person in life. Perhaps in all the worries and difficulties she had been untrue to him; she had become involved with strangers; now she would have to put aside this family that had been good to her. She would have to give up the three children and she was the only mother they had. Geschke would become gloomy and morose as before. Unexpected and warm and exciting as her happiness was, she hardly dared to

admit to herself that somehow it hurt her, as if her lover had been away too long. She knew now what she must do: she must take her own child and leave. Nor did she feel any remorse at going. Her main thought was: 'It will all work out, but at least I could have put the beans on to soak.'

The next morning she invented all sorts of schemes to keep Hans from running off. He eluded her and slipped down into the courtyard. Marie ran after him, rushed him back upstairs, put freshly washed clothes on him and dragged him off to Tante Emilie's with her.

'He's here,' said Emilie. And she added: 'But why did you bring the boy with you?'

The guest sprang to his feet. He had light hair parted in the middle and he wore a stiff collar and a tie. Marie clutched the child to her. Emilie looked from one to the other, her nostrils quivering with curiosity.

'Don't you recognize me, Fräulein Marie - excuse me, Frau Geschke?' cried the guest.

As Marie made no reply, he went on hastily: 'I'm a married man, too, I must admit. My wife doesn't know where I am. She wouldn't understand how I just couldn't keep away. She certainly wouldn't believe it was only sentiment, not a love affair. No matter what people always say it's the women who are fiends for facts and the men who have the romantic streak. I happened to see you turn in here one day. Then I remembered you used to live here. You made a tremendous impression on me then, Frau Geschke. I'm sure glad you're happy now, even if we didn't pull it off that time.'

Marie recognized the stranger as the man who had once proposed marriage to her on the Belle Alliance Platz and had advised her to get rid of the child she was carrying. He now took it for granted that the child before him had been born of her new marriage. To Marie this fresh-faced, light-haired young man who, in spite of the inflation, had put on weight, seemed like a ghost. She was terribly tired, and as sad as on that evening when she waited in vain for Erwin to come to her. All at once this stranger seemed to her irrefutable proof of the uselessness of all waiting. Spruce and lively in his gay-coloured tie though he was, he reminded her of a bird of death winging gaily to and fro over a grave.

The child was sleepy, so she put him down on the sofa. Then she counted the buttons and buttonholes. The stranger glanced stealthily at her lowered face. At first he had been slightly disillusioned, but now her silence, her bright hair, attracted him again. Emilie quickly brought in coffee and chattered away, making the small

talk at which she was particularly adept. This man, she thought, must be the father of the child her niece got rid of that time.

The next night Marie stayed home to work over some new button-holes. Every now and then she would get up and go in to lean over her boy who slept in the same bed with Franz, and run her fore-finger gently over his eyebrows. It was nearly morning by the time she went to bed. But just as the night before in her happiness she had felt an inexplicable sense of unrest, so now, deep at the heart of her despair, lay a sort of peace. The next morning she was up and away in time to buy a quarter of a sausage roll which, by noon, might be far beyond her price. When Geschke's fellow workers saw his lunch basket they all thought enviously how lucky he had been with his young wife.

V

Wenzlow ordered his men to finish cleaning out the block of flats before dark. Someone had fired two shots from one of the houses, wounding one of his men. The officers had occupied a bar which had first been cleared of customers and then surrounded by Guards. The walls were still covered with tattered leaflets of the Saxon government, Socialists appeals and proclamations of the Proletariat Hundertschaften. If those leaflets had had eyes, they would have been surprised to see men of the Reichswehr sitting there, men sent from Berlin to Saxony because of the Leftist government there, instead of to Bavaria where Rightist *putsches* were being made. Every few minutes single detachments appeared to report the progress of the search and disarmament in the flats.

In the particular block of houses under Wenzlow's command was an old bakery that supplied most of the families in the neighbourhood. The baker's apprentice was a man no longer young who had gone into the war early, been wounded and sent from one hospital to another. Finally he had landed back with his old baker again. The latter gave him food and lodging and tried to arouse his mind which had been badly shattered by the war. One could see from the way the left side of his face twitched that the man had been shell-shocked. He was a long, threadbare youth, as colourless and overgrown as potato stalks in a cellar. At this moment he came into the bar through a side entrance in a back street invisible from the houses under search. Before the war he had been an open-hearted, lively fellow. Now, because of his poor health and helpless condition, he instinctively looked for a protector wherever he happened to be. It had become second nature to him to make friends with the stronger

customers in the neighbourhood. He was too dull and too sickly to know anything about the world events that kept his customers, as well as everyone in Saxony, breathless. For a man in his condition there could be no thought of conferences or marches; certainly no defence of dwellings and no Red Hundertschaften. His trembling limbs, his stupid head, were too weak for him to compete with other men. But he felt in every fibre of his body that those shining companies of soldiers, bristling with arms, were a far better protection than the excited, frightened and shabby people among whom he lived. He was not strong enough to join the Temporary Volunteers, who, lured by the Reichswehr, were lined up in Saxony against that part of the population that supported the Red government – a thorn in the Reich government's flesh. This alliance between Communists and Socialists should have taught the whole Reich that such a friendship was possible.

Outside, the night was now silent: a woman's shriek, the slam of a door or a rattling and thumping up the stairs were sounds that could not be heard above the usual city noises of an ordinary evening. No one here in the bar, not connected with the search, could have guessed that a woman's cry meant that her husband was being arrested, that the rumbling upstairs, and the despairing kick against a chair meant that a house search was being carried out. The officers sitting at their round tables covered with maps of the city, lists of names and beer mugs well knew that all those noises were as much part and parcel of the dissolution of the government as were shots or commands, the deposition of the city council and the suppression of the Red Hundertschaften. They knew too that it was easier to dissolve the government of a province or depose the magistrate of a mighty city within a given time than to get rid of a proletariat Hundertschaften.

The baker's apprentice who had been standing for some time in the corner, his nostrils twitching, understood the noises quite as well as the officers. He could even place them better for he knew everything about each family and every step on the stairs in the block of houses in which his bakery stood. The captain ordered him roughly to come over to his table. He handed him a list of names considered suspect and ordered him again to make sure whether the men in the courtyard who had been arrested were on that list. Then he waved the man away through a side door. The adjutant came in through the main door from the street. He reported the action ended. The job had been finished before dark, the time limit. There was still a ray of daylight on the table littered with

documents, though it came only from a narrow slit of city sky through the bar window. The roofs of the houses meeting over the street allowed just space for a second strip of sky, grey-blue and washed out by the tortured day. Behind the window-pane through which a round bullet-hole gave a view in the room occupied by the officers lay a few bits of glass and broken bottles. The only thing untouched was an amazing bark flower-pot with a strange root hook – obviously the pride of its owner. On the wall still hung the notices of the last cell meetings and a government proclamation undersigned by Socialists and Communists. It was easy to see where the two bullets had struck home. One had gone through Wenzlow's man just as they were taking over the bar, before they had finished clearing out and surrounding the building. The other had gone over the counter – the bullet was embedded between two boards which it had cut through as cleanly as if it had taken particular care not to hit the beer glasses.

The captain bent his head down between the officers for a brief, whispered conference, and the adjutant drew back a step. The three lieutenants, one of them considerably older than the captain, the other two younger, hastily agreed with him. It would be best to sift the prisoners in the court, weeding out the most suspicious and responsible leaders of *Hundertschaften*; dangerous cell heads and such like. 'And see that it's all done before dark,' the captain repeated. He was a short man, intense and very straight; he looked up through the broken pane into the blue-grey sky, as if he were not a captain of the *Reichswehr*, but of the heavenly hosts. He was just about to dismiss his adjutant when the baker's apprentice came back through the side door and, at a nod from the captain, picked up the sharpened pencil from the table, chose and struck out two names from the selected list as carefully as a woman at market picks out two vegetables she needs from among all the others. With a stroke of his pencil the captain added the two new names to those already sifted. Then the baker's apprentice went over to his place beside the side door. Wenzlow shot him a brief glance without turning his head, for he did not want to attract the boy's attention. Wenzlow was still so young that his judgment was not warped by general impressions. In his military service he had had so little experience with such tuppenny-ha'penny fellows that the sight of the apprentice's pale face twisted with pain upset him.

'Why does that fellow betray two more names?' he wondered. 'Greed for money? The desire to make himself important? Or is he simply just crazy from shell-shock?'

The captain interrupted Wenzlow's thought by sending him into the courtyard to see that his orders were carried out. He took with him two soldiers who had been stationed a certain distance apart in front of the bar. The prisoners had just been counted as Wenzlow stepped through the two doors into the inner court. There were half a dozen men and two women. One of the women stood there stiff and motionless, with a serious face. Undoubtedly she had a thoroughly well thought out reason for shooting from her window twenty minutes before when the soldiers broke into the house. The other woman was very young, almost a child. She had bold eyes and a turned-up nose and she had shot as impudently as she had thrown stones a short time before. Wenzlow paid no attention to either the female or the male prisoners crowded into a corner of the now dusky courtyard. Soldiers with fixed bayonets guarded them and the last rays of the sun still caught the metal of the guns. Wenzlow called out the two names the apprentice had designated. The prisoners were herded into the adjoining court, a narrower space used for storing fuel between plank partitions and the fronts of houses opposite. On every floor in those houses guards were posted. The windows had been forcibly closed; those facing the court as well as on the street. Now in the courtyard the points of light on steel helmets and gun-barrels gradually began to fade. The ray of sunlight disappeared first in the lower courtyard window then on the first floor, then up on the second, till finally all the windows were blind. As the two men were separated from the group and thrust into the fenced enclosure they struggled violently in hatred and an instinctive fear of death. And in hatred and fear of death the guards felt equally vulnerable; alone, in spite of their guns, in this stone cage of hostile men. The officers at their table in the bar counted four shots. In the courtyard a soldier twisted a girl's arm and she screamed for help. She screamed so loud one could hear her all over the neighbourhood and even in the bar. She sank her teeth into the soldier's sleeve: she bit his finger.

The captain behind the table said: 'Liquidated.' By which he meant his order had been carried out. For a second it was as still as if all noises in the world had been exhausted in those four shots. It was as if not only the men who had been shot but all the others in the courtyard or behind the house fronts had stopped breathing. Even Wenzlow held his breath. From far away came the rumbling of a truck. The truck was coming to carry off the remaining prisoners. Soldiers began shoving with their gun-butts. The little girl got a sharp blow from a gun and had to be dragged away, still

biting and scratching. Then, from under the archway, came a single shot, a shot that neither the captain nor his men nor Wenzlow, in charge of moving the prisoners, could explain. Two soldiers came through, leading a stranger between them – a fair-haired boy still in his 'teens. The prisoner did not struggle. He just stood there glaring coolly and indifferently at them. When he saw a dead man carried out of the archway into the courtyard his mouth twisted in sarcasm. Wenzlow recognized the dead man at once – it was the baker's apprentice. Keeping their grip on the young man as he stood in front of Wenzlow, the soldiers showed him the revolver with which the boy had just shot the baker's apprentice. The murderer lived in another part of the city. He only came here occasionally as liaison officer. The boy's father had belonged to a proletariat Hundertschaften and, in the early days, like his ardent young son, he had expected great things. But during these last weeks when, with the arrival of the Reichswehr, the order from Berlin had been not to fight, but to disband, the old man had suddenly been disillusioned. When his gun was taken from him, he sat sour and embittered in a corner, as if he were as ashamed to appear on the street without insignia as to walk about naked.

The boy must have been well hidden. He was almost unknown. His name did not appear on any list, and, so far, no one had ever denounced him. Why he had come there that evening and how he had eluded the cordon, they could not discover. In any case he himself had made sure – or perhaps someone had told him – that the baker's apprentice was serving as a spy for the officers. He had followed him and shot him down in the archway through which one passed into the bakery.

At that moment an order came from the captain to make haste and get the prisoners away. Wenzlow gave the order again for the boy to be liquidated. The shots in the courtyard had sent the dwellers in the houses rushing to their windows, in spite of orders to the contrary. The families whose sons and husbands had been shot were wild with grief. The best thing to do was to leave the people to themselves, as long as the leaders were already under arrest. Indifferently, the boy allowed himself to be led into the cellar; he knew quite well what the outcome would be. He scarcely glanced at the dead already laying on the ground. Previously, as liaison officer, he had reported regularly to one of those men. Even after the bullet had pierced him and he lay across the other bodies, his cool young face looked as if he could still carry out his task even in death. In the courtyard, awaiting the command, he had stared

calmly at Wenzlow, not with fear or anxiety, but rather with interested attention.

Wenzlow ordered his men to pack the living prisoners into the first truck, the dead in the second. Then he ordered all troops to be withdrawn with the exception of the sentries who were to remain awhile in the archway and the halls.

That night Wenzlow had difficulty in falling asleep because he was overtired. He lay in bed thinking of objects and scenes as far removed from the present as possible – the girl next door, little Ilse Malzahn, the way she had looked up at him quickly and gratefully in the hall not so long ago. He saw her lips which he had not dared to kiss, and her little breasts which he had not dared to touch. Now, half awake, half asleep, he dared to do both. He imagined that his future mother-in-law, Frau Malzahn, watched them from the hall stairs, peering over Tante Amalie's shoulder. That was very funny. He turned the young girl's head so that she would not be embarrassed by the curiosity of the two old ladies. For himself he did not care. He went ahead and did what he wanted to do. It did not even bother him when the hall seemed to fill up with people. He tried, in his sleep, to drive the faces away, but he could not. There they stood, every step full – the captain, the three officers from the bar, his own soldiers, and on the very top step the one with the big ears who had been shot from the house that morning. Even the prisoners in the courtyard were there. In his dream they all stood peacefully together in the hall, united in common curiosity as to what he was going to do with the little Malzahn. The boy who killed the baker's apprentice stared at him calmly. His glance was very clear, not frightened, but attentive. There were small bright points in his grey eyes that bothered Wenzlow. But he was not the liaison officer for that block of houses as he had told them – he was a very different man. What was he doing here on the hall stairs? He, Wenzlow, had shot that man long ago. His grey face was much thinner; it had two bumps on the forehead and a cleft in the chin. Wenzlow would have liked to ask him something – he had wanted to ask him that time in Klemm's car: 'Why have you risked your life? Just tell me that. We are both about the same age.' But in Klemm's presence it had been impossible to ask those questions. Klemm was above all questions, not only this one. And Lieven even more so. It would not have done to ask such questions in the presence of the guard and the chauffeur. And there was no point now, for the man was dead. Klemm had nodded and he, Wenzlow, had fired

the shot. Now all the faces in the hall had vanished except Tante Amalie. She kept shaking her head reprovingly because of her nephew's behaviour with the little Malzahn. He tried to explain to her that Ilse was just the right girl for him. He could tell from his aunt's thin, tightened lips that his explanation made an impression. Even in his sleep he could feel that she was waiting faithfully for him at home. She was the only person on earth who was utterly and wholly his. She was certain to be thinking of her nephew at this very moment because she was always thinking of him.

Five

I

THE KITCHEN WINDOW looked out on the garden, and while Tante Amalie stirred her jam she could see everything that was going on outside without being seen herself. She could not refrain from peeping now and then at the lovers standing among the lilacs over the garden hedge, laughing because they thought no one was watching them. Tante Amalie's taut lips, that always looked as if they were pressed together in pain or anger, softened. A tender smile, such as usually comes from being in love, appeared in the corners of her eyes and mouth. Her bony face, looking longer than ever because of her high collar and piled-up hair, flushed as if she herself were being kissed for the first time. The tender expression on her face, the softness of her movements, showed how she herself might have looked if the soft winds of life that blow away the dust from leaves and bitterness from old maids had swept over her. The young man had stopped pleading with the girl in the next door garden. Now he was measuring her hand in his – see, as tiny as a little bird in a nest!

The girl in the next door garden was, to be sure, still too young for love. Tante Amalie thought she was also too stupid to appreciate what a fine lover fate had offered her. Wenzlow was the image of his father, her brother, at twenty, thirty years of age. He had the same head of bright hair. Perhaps the son was, on the whole, smarter in appearance and finer in physique. That was the result

of the war: in the previous war of 1870 her brother had unfortunately been still a child. The war had made a man of her nephew. He had learned through danger and sacrifice, not merely from text-books and manœuvres. Men like that, with power over other men and authority over life and death – thought Tante Amalie – are especially prone to love something tender and soft. She could well understand why her nephew was now madly in love with the insignificant little girl from next door. Later, she might even turn out to be the right wife for him, for she had been reared by honourable parents on the same principles which Amalie herself had inculcated into her nephew and niece. At present the girl was too young, but that was a failing which is soon outgrown. When Tante Amalie saw the girl lay her head on the man's breast and watched as he caressed the hair only a little fairer than his own, every stroke of his hand seemed to caress Tante Amalie's heart as if she herself were being embraced for the first time. Tante Amalie had never known love. Her mother had died at an early age and she had kept house for her father and later on for her brother, whose wife had also died young. She had never been pretty, but she had always been proud of her features which, pretty or not, bore an almost absurd likeness to the features of all her family. When officers at Liebesmahl had had a little to drink they often said that the Crown Prince, like Tante Amalie and Frederick the Great, had the same longish greyhound's face flattened at the sides and the same lightly curved nose. They liked to make jokes about the possibility of a slip in the royal family in past centuries when the Wenzlows had been very close to the Court. Tante Amalie was even proud now that she had kept the name so dear to her and had never been obliged to change it by marrying.

She put her currants to cook on the gas stove. As she stepped back to the kitchen table – though she had nothing more to do there – she was just in time to see Wenzlow take the little Malzahn's head between his two hands and kiss her on the lips. Tante Amalie's far-sighted old eyes could even see the girl blush scarlet. She blushed herself: that kiss had gone through and through her. She had felt it more intensely perhaps than the little Malzahn, for the simple reason that in Tante Amalie, stiff and plain as she was, there were far greater depths of emotion. The little Malzahn felt the first kiss and then a second, and then a third which lasted much longer. But with each kiss, Tante Amalie felt the confused lapse of time, the invisible future, the end of this new generation which she herself would outlive.

Someone called from the next-door garden: 'Ise.'

The girl jumped back. Wenzlow broke off a twig of lilac: he still had it between his teeth when he walked into the kitchen where his aunt was stirring currants. 'Now you'll want to taste it,' she said to her nephew and held out the long spoon which he licked greedily just as he used to do as a boy, only now he did not have to stand on tiptoe, but bent his head down to the spoon. His aunt smiled with compressed lips.

'Would you like me to ask the little Malzahn to supper?' she said. And she felt like the queen of conspirators as she added: 'Unfortunately I can't ask the others too. There are just enough groats for the three of us.'

'Oh, you wonderful woman!' Wenzlow cried.

No man had ever said that to Tante Amalie. She promptly began stirring the currants as hard as she could and her heart beat wildly for joy. The little secrecy and slyness for which she had never before had occasion made up to her for never having been engaged herself.

'The kitchen is so spattered with currant juice anyone would think you'd been having a blood bath.'

Fräulein von Wenzlow said slyly: 'The girl could help me pack too. Your orderly is not nearly expert enough. It'll do her no harm to begin to get some notion of all the odds and ends a soldier needs when he goes off to war or on manoeuvres.'

'I'm going to get a lift in a car as far as Halle. Early tomorrow morning at four we go on from there. The Chief won't tell us the exact route till then.'

'It's a pity that nothing has come of the Baltic.'

Tante Amalie had overcome her first revulsion against the Reichswehr. She had not been bothered with unwelcome visitors, as she had feared. There had been no embarrassing social duties; no forced intimacy with all sorts of republican riff-raff; the kind of people you felt you needed to wash your own hands after touching theirs.

Old Malzahn had laughed heartily at her. 'Don't worry about the boy. I'd like to know which is more degrading to our youth - to swear loyalty to the Republic or to sell vacuum cleaners from door to door. At least we in the Korps have still enough honour left to drive the swine out of the Reich. We'll soon weed the Reds and Pinks out of our ranks.'

'But why is it a pity, Tante Amalie?' asked the young man. 'It is much less important for us to be in the North. In the centre of Germany they have urgent need of our manoeuvres. That's the

place where, year in year out, the Reds have been raising a rumpus. Herr Ebert managed to keep out his Communistic half-brothers for just one year; then back they came again. Why? Because we have to send political representatives to the Reichstag, because we are now a Republic and we like to imitate our neighbours, the English and the French, by holding a secret and direct ballot. That's why we now have sixty Communist members instead of the four before the Party was outlawed. That is why it's a good thing to show this pack in middle Germany by manœuvring under their noses that we can still shoot straight. Well, dearest Tante Amalie, I must get a little rest before I start off on this journey. I'm afraid of sitting down in your groats, so I'll go into the living-room. Since you're so wonderfully clever at these things, Tante dear, do me a favour and ask the little Malzahn to supper.'

II

Marie's husband, Geschke, had not accompanied the group that marched through Berlin after the news of Lenin's death. 'After all, we're not Russians,' the men at the garage had said. 'Don't go with them. The Communists would only make a lot out of it for themselves.'

Schlueter, a half-grown youth, turned pale with rage.

'What do you mean, for themselves? What would they make out of it?'

'Take it easy, boy. Calm down. You know you always dance when Moscow pipes the tune.'

Geschke listened silently as the quarrel went on and on. The boy with the dark eyes, shiny as coals, who wore his father's discarded soldier's coat, discoloured and worn but apparently indestructible, was referring to the working people of the whole world and the vanguard of the working class. The garage men were speaking of individual men and women, people they knew by name, expendable human beings, liked or disliked as the case might be. Geschke quietly cranked up his car and made ready to drive off. His eye fell once more on the young boy and, as frequently happens at tense moments when emotions and mental impressions mingle, he suddenly remembered that March morning when this same boy, wearing the same coat (it had been too big for him then), turned on the taps laughing merrily, to see whether the general strike was on. The quarrel disgusted him. Up to a point he could see what each side was driving at, but he was not the man to find the solution and

he did not know who was. In any case he decided not to go with them, though at the bottom of his heart he doubted whether going meant 'dancing to the tune Moscow pipes'. That was not the only reason he did not go. Once again men in all jobs were being laid off: if anyone had seen him in that marching line, it would have been difficult for him to get a new job at the employment bureau. There had been many times in his life when he had neither feared the jeers of his comrades nor worried about losing his job. Perhaps the man they had just buried had really been a great man; perhaps he had had a tremendous idea in mind, though it had failed and hordes of starving children wandered through his land. Perhaps it would not have failed if all the workers throughout the world had joined with him. He, Geschke, could not have helped him all by himself. He certainly could not help him now by going to his funeral.

On the way home from a distant building site he was held up by a long procession. His eyes searched the endless rows of men, marching four abreast, for the boy in the grey-green soldier's tunic, as one looks for a familiar point in a crowd which is too large to take in at one glance. That morning, one of the men had tried to soothe the boy. No one had anything against Lenin, he said. He had probably had something big for his people in mind. Had he lived he might have been able to carry it out. But now it was all over, both with him and with his plans. Geschke did not get the impression that those plans were at an end. He was sorry he had not gone with these people, but, even had he wanted to join them, the ranks seemed closed. He wondered what sort of a man Lenin had been and whether, if he could have witnessed his own funeral, he would have been proud of this procession and of the other processions throughout the whole world. In every city, all over the globe, they were forming in line - white and black and brown and yellow faces. If the lines of the mourners could have been placed end to end they would have reached round the earth. Geschke felt that he followed that funeral procession as if attached to them with a fine wavering thread from the bottom of his heart. Beside him stood a little man, shivering in his thin coat. His ears were red with cold under his shabby hat. He murmured:

'The whole bunch ought to go and bury themselves with him.'

A woman beside him, his wife perhaps, though she was fatter and taller, said audibly: 'For German workers I consider a thing like this an outrage.' Geschke stared at them darkly. Suddenly the answer occurred to him. 'To stand with people like you on the side of the pavement is an outrage,' he thought, just as if he were looking

objectively at the procession and the onlookers, almost forgetting that he indeed was merely a spectator. The tenuous thread from his heart that still followed the procession, seemed to attach him to the heart of life, making it impossible for him to flutter around like a withered leaf.

He reached home later than usual. Marie had not seen him so sullen since the first days of their acquaintance. She had watched the procession with a few of the neighbours. Had her husband marched with the mourners?

'What for?' he asked. 'We're not Communists.'

A curt, brusque answer to the same question that had bothered him that morning. He realized that in speaking to Marie he had unconsciously used the same words with which his fellow-workers had answered the Schlueter boy: 'It's none of our business: we're not Russians.'

They sat down at the table. The children ate their evening meal and listened avidly to the words their parents spoke across the table. They did not mix much with other children: the girl, Helene, would rather stay at home than play in the yard. The children down there made fun of her and she had stopped defending herself. The big boy was left in peace because he was a strong, good-looking fellow and knew all sorts of trades. He could carve and draw – that was why he sat about the house so much. The youngest of Geschke's own three was the one the family paid least attention to so long as he did not get into mischief or tear his trousers. He didn't understand everything his parents were saying and only a few words stuck in his mind: 'It's none of our business; we're not Russians.'

In his last year at school he had had a teacher to whom he was more devoted than to his own parents. This man had told Franz recently that his family ought to realize what it meant to be German – it meant father, mother, bread, their language, fuel and potatoes. He had praised Franz for his composition. Then he had hung up the great map of Germany. At home Geschke never looked at their schoolbooks because he saw no reason for it. Even if he had, he would just have laughed at them or have told about something out of his own schooldays.

The youngest boy looked at his mother to see whether she would give him more soup. Marie had ladled out as many spoonfuls as went round equally. The smallest boy cleaned the plate, then he looked at her again. He knew there was nothing more to come; he just wanted to look at her. She had always been there as long as he had himself. Just as the sun had always been there as long as men

could remember. Marie caught his eye. She thought: 'Yes, you and I.' But she would not give him any more soup than she gave his stepbrothers and stepsister.

The water boiled on the hob. It was terribly hot in the kitchen. The day was drawing to an end. The family was sleepy. At this moment there seemed to be nothing, not even a shadow, to disturb their peace. The afterglow shone red with the sharp red of frosty evenings. The children blew on the window against the frost flowers that had already formed. Geschke scolded because one of them opened the window to scratch off the frost from the outside. Marie's thoughts were far away. When had she gazed, with eyes dry with unshed tears, at the frost flowers on the window of her empty bedroom? It was scarcely a memory now that she had waited in vain for her lover - at the most a dream. It all seemed to have happened before her real life began. The real life was the present with all sorts of work, all sorts of suffering and disappointments and a little fun. The past lay too far behind to hurt now, yet at the same time it was present to her as one winter resembles another.

III

Gleim offered Lieven his own carriage to take him from the estate to the railway station. He even offered him his leather valise in case his friend was short of hand luggage. Lieven, however, kept putting off his departure. During all the past tense weeks, though he was shrewd enough to realize that the revolution had been postponed indefinitely, he had been glad to keep away from his friends. He listened almost indifferently to the prophecies that circulated in the common hall where the officers gathered, talking in excited groups, discussing the latest reports and frequently coming out with the strangest surmises. They looked for a signal from the West soon, particularly when the passive resistance on the Ruhr suddenly came to an end. It was still possible that the Germans had merely yielded the field to the French in order to assemble all the Freikorps quietly in the East and take back the Upper Silesian lands. But soon all eyes were fixed on the south where, suddenly, an utterly crazy little man of whom one had never heard, was getting himself much talked about in Munich.

'He probably thought,' Lieven said one night to Luettgens as they talked from one bed to the other, 'that all Germany would gasp in surprise if he marched to the Feldhernhalle with a few followers. But there wasn't much to it - a couple of shots and it was all over!'

And the opposition didn't come from the Left either! In that case we would have had to fight. Major Lettow-Vorbeck, with just his old East Africans, put down that trouble on the barricades in Hamburg that lasted a few days. The Reichswehr made short work of the Reds in Saxony. Both sides lost their wind and the final decision was again deferred. I never did think anything would come of that mess. A revolution is a very different thing. You should have been with me in Russia in 1917 and you'd have seen how trouble like that gets going.'

But as the long-awaited signal did not come, each man had to make a decision for himself. How should he spend this interim period that threatened to stretch out indefinitely? Stay on longer here on the estate? Luettgens and Lieven had had enough of that. Go to friends in a big city? But they were poor, embittered, helpless. Fortunately there were still a few countries in the world that offered war and revolution . . . that frontier between life and death where a man stood alone. Why life? Why death? That was not the question. In Berlin, where one could get everything, there was even a sort of bureau recruiting officers for a certain Abdel Krim and his Riff Kabilen who were fighting the French and Spanish in Africa.

'It would be fun to have a crack at annoying the French down there,' Luettgens said.

But Lieven laughed. All that mattered to him, he said, was that this Abdel Krim, or whatever he called himself, would send them into a rousing good fight as soon as possible – he didn't care against whom. There were all sorts of amusing countries in South America – Bolivia, Paraguay, and so on. They had their consulates and their recruiting offices, too. Gleim's relatives in Berlin knew a lot of people who had their fingers in that pie.

Luettgens hesitated to make the venture without money. But Lieven was bored to tears with his surroundings. He decided to go to his cousin's and wait there till he had a definite answer. He could not stand this place and these people any longer – all these men had seen so many plans for the future fail.

At their last breakfast together, Gleim, with his peculiarly timid courtesy as if he were afraid of annoying his friend, handed Lieven his railway ticket in an envelope. Though Gleim had urged him to stay, Lieven knew that at heart his host was relieved to see him depart. The young fiancée from Berlin was fond of sitting with the guests of honour, particularly with Lieven, for whom, perhaps more than for her prospective husband, she dressed with the greatest care. Lieven never failed to compliment her on the colour she had chosen

or to notice that she was wearing a new blouse. As he said good-bye, he thought to himself that he might have made better use of his time with this young girl, but he had been too engrossed with his fairy-tale maiden with the long plaits. That girl now lay somewhere in a strange city in a strange bed. He had dropped her more quickly and completely than if the affair had worn itself out. It would not have been worth while to take on someone inferior. The future Frau von Gleim, typical, sophisticated product of a big city, could not compare with his country Gretchen.

At the last breakfast Lieven was once more the guest of honour. When the great house door closed behind him, after it the carriage door and finally the train door, he would be only a man without a job and without a home. He sensed this already, though he made up his mind not to worry, not even to think that his plan to go abroad might fail. Nothing, he believed, so weakens the chance of success as worry and doubt. The feeling he now had was probably only the result of his homelessness; the uncertainty that he had known from his youth. How often had he not seen the faces of friends and relatives in that light, at once ruthless and tender, that seems to illumine lands and faces to which one says good-bye.

On the way to the station he told himself that at least he could be glad he was travelling through this deserted land for the last time. Gleim's coachman had carried the borrowed suitcase to the station restaurant for him. Lieven shook hands with him in good-bye. Small as the suitcase was, Lieven's few belongings seemed to rattle in it. He possessed nothing but the necessary under-linen and, apart from his riding clothes, only his uniform. He now wore a well-preserved but ancient civilian suit. The last ten years had left him little more than his own body. He thought proudly, as he waited for the train over his last glass of beer, that he was not taking any booty with him. That sort of thing he left to others. He left his sweethearts too wherever he found them, on every stretch of army road, in Finland, in Berlin, on the Rhine, in Silesia - as one leaves a figurehead on a shipwrecked vessel.

He realized that someone at the next table was staring at him, someone who was neither a peasant nor a gentleman - it was Schubhut, the bailiff who had been dismissed because he had taken to drink. The man had been warned again and again, but had refused to listen. Lieven had heard of his dismissal and also that a new bailiff had moved into the rose-covered cottage.

It was too late for Lieven to change tables. Schubhut was already on his feet and coming straight towards him:

'So there you are at last!' It was obvious that the man had been drinking heavily.

Lieven rose. The bailiff held him back with the tenacious mildness peculiar to drunkards.

'I'm living here in the village. You don't know what it'd mean to me to talk straight from the shoulder? Why from the shoulder? Do you talk from the shoulder?'

'A drunken fool,' thought Lieven. He felt no pity, only disgust. He pressed his elbows to his side, but his fear that the man might turn ugly was quickly allayed.

'I come down to meet every train and wait for my girl,' Schubhut went on. 'Why? She's not doing badly at all. She's in Berlin, working for a good family.'

Lieven was incautious enough to ask: 'Didn't she go back to school?'

'Oh no, oh no,' said Schubhut. 'I can't afford school money any more. Of course it'd be better for the girl if her father could provide for her.'

'Undoubtedly,' said Lieven.

'Yes, wouldn't it? You're the only man I can talk straight from the shoulder to.' The expression seemed to please him. 'Remember when you began coming to our house less and less and suddenly you didn't come at all - just as if you'd vanished into thin air? Well, I waited and looked out for you just as much as my girl did. I almost felt like crying the way she used to.'

Like all drunks, he began spilling every thought in his head, all mixed wildly together. He could not remember what Lieven's appearance and disappearance had to do with his downfall. He merely knew that he had always liked the man's face.

'Tell her,' he pleaded, 'when you see her, to write to me sometimes.'

'I'll give her your message,' said Lieven, 'if I see her.'

Schubhut made an awkward attempt to put his astonishingly long arms around Lieven. He kept trying to say good-bye to him. Lieven was relieved when the train pulled into the station. Schubhut insisted upon helping him carry the suitcase into the compartment. At the last moment he almost fell under the wheels with the valise. Lieven had to pull him back on the platform where he stood waving till the train disappeared from sight, though Lieven was no longer looking out of the window.

After a number of changes and waits he came to a station from which he had to go on foot to the village of Olmuetz near his

cousin's home. He carried Gleim's suitcase on a strap slung over his shoulder. And with every step he took his spirits rose. The past lay behind him; the light valise was no bother on the country road that glistened in the moonlight like a ribbon of water. It was so quiet that one could hear the cows chewing their cud. There were still lights in single farmhouses, outposts of the surrounding villages, with their deep projecting roofs. On the other side Gleim's land looked like a desert waste. Though it was impossible to see the sea and the night was still, Lieven could feel the nearness of the Baltic, the mother of many lands.

In ten minutes' time the country road became the main street through the village of Olmuetz. Lieven had never given a thought to his cousin's habits. But the moment he saw the spare farmhouse, with the low roof which, like all the houses here, made it look like a nesting bird, and the style of architecture that seemed rather to simplify than adorn it, he knew at once that it could belong only to his Cousin Lieven. The flag had been run up in honour of his arrival. Lieven recognized the little dog that had been with Otto Lieven in the Baltic provinces. He was named Pereswon after a dog in a novel.

The sound of his dog barking warned Otto Lieven that his cousin had arrived. He was standing on the steps before Ernst Lieven had passed through the garden gate to the house door. 'Ah! At last!' he shouted, and flung his arms around his cousin, even kissing him. It was a long time since Ernst Lieven had had such a greeting and he wondered for a second what his cousin's words: 'At last!' meant. In this confusion of wrecked and newly made plans his Cousin Otto could not possibly have been expecting him.

But later, as they dined together on a table separated from the large kitchen by a patterned curtain, Ernst Lieven had, to his own astonishment, the feeling that he had come home at last. Every movement, every tone of his cousin gave him that sense of rest and assurance he had always felt in his restless, rootless youth beneath this family roof. True, it was not the roof of the vast manor house with the Alexandrine columns beyond Riga, but the low-gabled roof of a beggarly farmhouse. His cousin had purchased the few acres of land with borrowed money and he had worked hard to pay off his debts and to make a home for his mother and sister who lived somewhere in a large city. Otto Lieven was the first to rise at dawn with his men and the last to go to bed at night, staying up late in his room to write letters and go over his accounts.

Ernst Lieven watched him with amazement written all over his equally long, equally handsome face. Otto's face was tanned as

brown as a peasant's, but there were lines of strain and worry about his eyes and mouth.

Lieven explained to his cousin that he was now waiting to hear from the man to whom the Gleim family had recommended him. Any day now he might be called to Berlin and have to leave at once for the Riff to join the staff of Abdel Krim – if those savages had such a thing as a staff.

'Why are you so set on going away?' asked Otto Lieven. 'You have just finished fighting for Germany. Why fritter away your strength in Africa. We need every atom of our own people's in this country.'

'What for?' Ernst Lieven asked. 'Where? Behind a cashier's window in a bank? That's where I'll probably land if this plan to go abroad goes to pot. That's where they need us – or in a radio firm.' It annoyed him to have spoken aloud something he did not even like to think. He added, as if to defend himself against his cousin's silence: 'You, of course, still consider yourself the head of the family. Even if you yourself live in poverty you feel bound to come to our aid with practical help and advice. You look upon that as your duty, don't you? You wear yourself out although you know quite well that you won't get any farther. You slave away at those fields you've rented as if you were going to be paid for it.'

'Perhaps,' said Otto Lieven. He bowed his head. His face was calm, but very pale now under the brown skin. 'When I was a boy my father taught me to look at anything that came into my possession as a reward: fields, a horse, a child. This land is part of me. It has been given me in trust so that I shall take proper care of it. My father learned this from his father and he from his and so on – further and further back. With others it may be different; they have all forgotten. With us that is the way it is, and always will be.'

Ernst Lieven's anger faded. He had impulse to stroke his cousin's hair, as if he were a naughty but earnest child. Instead he said: 'My dear Otto, in the days when the Teutonic Order of Knights took over the lands round the Baltic, there were just as many strange countries as those in which we now have to fight.'

'Perhaps you remember,' said his cousin as though speaking of something that had happened a few years ago, 'that in those days we were given our reward after we had carried the Master of the Order over the frozen sea in a sled made of our shields. That was how we earned our estate which the English have now presented to the Letts, together with what land remains. But in those days we won it because we were worthy of it. It was the frontier of Germany.'

It did not lie somewhere far off like the land to which you wish to go.'

'My dear Otto, it is also the frontier of another land, for that's the way frontiers are.'

'Yes, but we were the stronger. We had that virtue in us which gave us the right to possession.'

'In those days we were stronger, and after us the Russians were stronger, and now at last the English. Perhaps you would come with me yourself, Otto, if you were stronger. I believe the test of possession is the ability to be stronger than the other fellow.'

'I don't believe that is what you think at all! Why you are . . .'
He searched for the word and ended: 'After all, you're a Christian.'

Ernst laughed. 'Now you are going to be thoroughly disillusioned. I am not a Christian in any sense of the word. I am pagan through and through. I worship what pagans worship: strength and beauty and power and lust.'

The elder cousin looked at him calmly, attentively:

'Even pagans worshipped other gods besides lust and power. Wisdom, for instance . . . Well, I suggest we turn in early. I hope you have a good night under my roof.'

His roof, thought Lieven. Those words meant something special to him: shelter and peace.

He was glad to spend this period of waiting here, in his cousin's home. And he slept so soundly and so long that his cousin had been in the fields several hours before he rose. In the evening he asked Otto who the two beautiful women in the photograph he had been looking at were.

'Have you forgotten my mother and my sister?'

'The mother looks like a girl in the picture and the girl like a woman.'

Lieven was spared the danger of being too much alone with his serious cousin by the presence of a permanent guest in the house - the village schoolmaster from Hamburg. He was a tall, fair-haired, slovenly fellow. He had fought through the war from beginning to end and now brought the many experiences he had acquired from it to bear on his profession and his pupils. Every evening, sitting at ease in Lieven's library, with his long arms and legs wound round a chair, he was in the habit of pouring out his thoughts. The battles in the West; in Middle Germany, Hamburg and Saxony; were present to their eyes in that far-off farmhouse. Though they quarrelled hotly, they were the best friends in the village; there was no one else for them to fight with. Ernst Lieven was surprised. The stories this fair-haired, slovenly young teacher told, he knew only as

the ideas of Bolsheviks, Jews, and hordes of dissatisfied, barbarous people. In every village, every lane, thought Lieven, there must be talk like this going on in a room like this with homemade furniture and pictures of Lenin or Hindenburg, of Schlageter and Ludendorff, or of Jesus Christ. A threadbare device for passing the intervening time, like the many books Otto Lieven collected on his shelves, like the violin playing with which both men frequently ended their quarrel. Perhaps that was what peace was: overriding one another's opinion and then criticizing each other endlessly, without any danger and at one's leisure.

'The strength of history has never lain in the masses,' said his cousin. 'It lies only in ideas, and ideas derive from individuals like you and me.'

'We are called materialists,' said the teacher, 'not because we look upon matter as something praiseworthy, but because we want to conquer it. Thousands of people are smothered in matter, starving and unable to think their thoughts. Not until the people are freed of the burden of matter can we know what ideas they are capable of producing.'

'The socialist's construction based on destruction,' said Lieven. 'Revolution never progresses in an orderly, neat fashion. There is blood and dirt in the great house-cleaning. So it was with the French Revolution; so it was with us in the Peasants' War in the Middle Ages. Nor did Christianity bring peace and order in its train. The best Romans of those days hated it, because it dug into the depths, because it stirred up the masses in every nation. For the first time in history there was something for every man, woman and child – for the people as a whole, not just for individuals, privileged ones, like you and me. It was not international. It did not rouse the people. It was supranational. It united the best from all nations in an idea that was greater than any nation. What do you think?'

Otto turned so quickly to his cousin that Lieven did not have time to hide the expression of mockery on his face.

'What do you suppose I think?' he said. 'I can't race through the whole universe as quickly as you.'

The schoolmaster said: 'What is your idea of an idealist? A man who treasures his ideas above his well-being? Then we, we are idealists. Because we are fighting with our lives against matter which degrades people.'

'Wait and see,' thought Ernst Lieven. All those words seemed to him like the dust of many events. And all the medley of words merely the blowing of the dust.

He could put up with the quiet here as long as he was waiting for something better. Then came a letter from Berlin in which Gleim's brother-in-law wrote that the recruiting had been discontinued. If Lieven would care to go to Munich, where many of his countrymen were now living, he knew some people in Berlin who wangled jobs in banking and industrial circles for discharged clerks and officers of good family.

At times Ernst Lieven thought that perhaps his cousin was right: you represented the élite of your race no matter where you were. Even if the place was nothing better than the agency for a company of electric display signs, which was the job Gleim's brother-in-law offered him as a consolation prize in his next letter.

IV

Wilhelm Nadler was greatly surprised when his brother suddenly appeared in his kitchen – a thing he never did in the evening. Liese was just chopping food for the food trough; she always prepared it at night so as to be finished with the pigs before she went out to the fields. Christian began as slowly and modestly as ever: he had come to a decision and he felt he must share it with his brother at once. His father's will – Wilhelm picked up his ears at that important word which Christian barely muttered – well, their father's will provided for his sons about equally. As the property went to the eldest, and the middle son had not come back from the war, there was some compensation due to him, Christian. Some of the family belongings, too, would be his by rights should he ever move out of the house. He wasn't much of a help in the fields, he knew. But he had helped his brother with a part of his pension; in fact, as his brother could see from the receipts, he had even paid more than the amount. Liese's bright blue eyes kept darting sharp glances into the chopped beets. She could feel a wild storm of anger boiling up inside Wilhelm. His face already looked bloated with rage. Christian kept on, mumbling in the same low tone and his words seemed rambling and disconnected. Wilhelm controlled his temper.

'Well, come on! Out with it!' he grumbled.

'Oh, yes,' said Christian. He had been thinking it would be better for all parties if he moved away from the place. There was a shack down on that piece of land by the lake. It had once been used for a boathouse. If a man had a mind to, he could still fix it up and make it do for a while. It would be just the right sort of workshop. Wilhelm

would save on expenses. He, Christian, now had regular customers and he could take care of them easily enough when he went to church. In short, if his brother would lend a hand and if he were going down to that lake property, say, tomorrow morning, then he could take along what little stuff and bed linen Christian had, on the wagon with him. Even if the shack was still shabby, the rain would not rot it away.

'Is that all?' asked Wilhelm. He was relieved that his brother did not bring up anything more. So all that preamble about the will had nothing to do with the main subject, the old hobbledehoy!

'Yes, that's all,' said Christian. 'Only see that you do it for me tomorrow, also the tiles for the roof. You'll get them at the yard for almost nothing.' He waited a moment, then he added: 'Even better, just go over to the "Eiche" right now. The contractor is sitting there and you can do business with him.' And he hobbled off in short, quick jerks, just as he talked.

Biting her lips, Liese carried the heavy trough to the pigs. She was even glad of the strain on her heart for the physical pain dulled emotions she herself did not understand. She mistrusted her brother-in-law's decision. Though she had avoided him since her husband's return, the mere fact of his presence in the stable had been comforting. She liked to hear him moving about; and at mealtime together she liked to lean over as she served his soup so that he could see her breasts in the opening of her dress. And if her husband, the sneak, the dirty dog, had sometimes grumbled, Liese had enjoyed it. At night, when her own man crept into bed with her, she thought it a good joke on her brother-in-law who could hear them from his workshop next door, and on her own man who had first threatened dreadful things and then climbed down.

She went over to the workshop. Her brother-in-law did not look up from the shoes he was working on.

'What's come over you, anyway, that you want to get out all of a sudden?'

He answered, without looking up: 'I want to be my own boss. I'm not going to have someone always poking into my business.'

'And who's been poking into your business, I'd like to know?'

Liese settled her hands on her hips and prepared for a long speech. At that moment the door across the way slammed and Nadler called: 'Liesel!' She shrugged her shoulders and trudged over to the kitchen. Christian listened. So his brother hadn't bought the tiles yet. However, with or without a roof, he was moving out into the shack early tomorrow morning. He realized that Liese could not

stand unnecessary annoyances. She was the mistress on the farm and she had a pack of children. He himself was farmer enough to know what that meant. It was just that he had grown too used to the woman. She could not keep from brushing close against him as she passed the way women do. Therefore it was better to keep out of the way of the two here. Also, unlike Wilhelm, Christian really yearned from the bottom of his heart to live in peace. There he could sit on his three-legged stool in front of his shack and watch the water sparkle or hear from afar off someone, whose step you recognized, drawing near. There, too, you could hear the foghorns at sea. Here everything was narrow and stuffy after a time.

He heard a great noise across the yard from the kitchen. Then Liese came to the workshop a second time:

'You've got to come over. The cattle-dealer is here again. Everything's going wrong.'

Christian followed as quickly as he could.

The cattle dealer wore city shoes and a stained rubber coat. He looked down at them calmly. Wilhelm was red with rage.

'Now just listen to this; he wants that good new beast driven away early tomorrow.'

'Take it easy,' said Christian. 'And you, Herr Levi, what's wrong with you now?'

'Excuse me, please, but your brother himself arranged with me - if the taxes aren't paid, the beast goes back to the seller, after due warning. I warned him, and now I've come for the animal.'

'I don't owe you anything but the last instalment,' Wilhelm shouted. 'That's all I owe!'

'I'm not getting the animal for nothing. The last instalment is just about what I myself earn. I'm not working for the fun of it, any more than you milk for the fun of it. If you don't pay me now, then we'll take the animal away tomorrow.'

'There's still a gun in the house. We'll see who takes what away tomorrow. How'd you like a load of shot in your filthy rubber coat?'

'Herr Nadler, don't make trouble for yourself. You don't want to have the government on your neck. If I have to make a complaint, then the police will take over.' He spoke as calmly as a man who sees from the sky that it is going to hail and is annoyed but not surprised. So far Christian had not interfered. He had listened till the situation was clear in his mind.

'The government,' stormed Wilhelm. 'D'you think they'd help people like you to cheat a decent farmer?'

Christian got up.

'Wait a moment. Here, Liese, give him a drop of Kirseh, then we can talk things over better.' He limped away. Liese automatically obeyed Christian as in the old days. By the time the little glass was empty Christian was back with his paper.

'Here you have another written guarantee. So now you can put it off. There's a paper here too with everything on it my brother owes me. I'll make it over to you. That won't hurt the three of us. The mark won't go jumping around any more. It's good and solid.'

'Well, all right,' said the cattle-dealer and studied the note of indebtedness. He drained the last drop in his glass. The younger brother's blue eyes suddenly turned on him – and they were so hard and so blank that the dealer had as little desire to talk as if the muzzle of a gun were pointed at him.

The next morning, when Wilhelm harnessed his wagon to drive out to the land beside the lake, Christian came up to him. His brother helped him load his belongings; his shoemaker's last; the three-legged stool. The neighbours, watching this removal, said to one another: 'Now Wilhelm has got rid of Christian.'

Although the shack by the lake was not habitable, it had thick walls and a cast-iron stove. Liese watched the moving from the kitchen window. When the wagon drove out of the village, she turned away. She felt as if she could cry and cry. But compared to the fields and her children's inheritance, her grief was unimportant. She seldom cried: emotions that moved other women to tears generally left her dry-eyed. Now, behind the kitchen window, her eyes remained blank and cold as stone.

The boathouse was soon arranged as a workshop with a projecting roof over the landing stage. The moving day was sunny. Christian promptly sat down with his work by the water. He had thanked his brother for the great help he had been to him. And his halting, embarrassed words had caused his brother to believe that he had fully caused the thanks. Now Christian Nadler looked up with one of his sharp glances straight across the land to where he could see his brother behind his plough.

The autumn would soon be so cold and windy that Christian would have to move back from the front to the shack. His brother brought him a load of wood, coals and a few briquettes. Each time Christian thanked him timidly, so that Wilhelm believed that he had once more done his younger brother a great service. Christian liked his life in the windy old shack. There was no one to watch him. He would rather be pitied than suspected. He had had enough of

quiet pleasure. He needed no official rank in a union, no commendation at roll-call. He did not thirst after fame, the only thing which gave zest to his brother's life.

It also amused him to pick out from all the bowed heads far off in the fields the round, pale yellow head of the only child that meant anything to him – the cuckoo's egg in his brother's full nest. As he nailed and pounded his thoughts wove on: he was the one who called the tune on the farm; he did not need trumpets for it either. Everything depended upon him. The less they knew of it the better.

A sudden knock on the door. That must be the dealer again. The instalment had not been paid. The only cash on the farm was at Christian's. The Berlin Hotel that had bought provisions from Nadler had long since gone back to the wholesale market.

'You look,' said Christian, 'like the first man our Lord God made out of clay.'

'The ground is all wet and muddy from the rain,' wailed the little man. 'You brother wouldn't harness up his wagon for me.'

'Then why did you come here, Herr Levi?'

The little man, whining, told his sad story. Christian couldn't very well leave his only brother in a mess. The bankruptcy sale couldn't be postponed for ever.

Christian knew well the gradation of the complaints which began with the payment due and ended with the Lord God. To relinquish all claim to the debts and let himself be ruined one would have to have a character that was not of this earth, so naturally one thought of heaven. The old man sometimes wondered why this brother always came to the rescue each time: certainly not just for Jesus' sweet sake.

Christian so arranged matters that this time again he had the full amount of Wilhelm's indebtedness on his paper. Like his brother he could not stand the dealer. He could not bear to listen to his chatter: silence Christian understood as a sign of power. He hated his brother, too, because he was always talking, boasting about what he did in the war and quoting things they said in their meetings. He hated the one and he could not abide the other.

At the front he had never been given to observing things: he had never noticed that bullets had favourites. They had been there for everyone just as God's sun was – for good and bad alike. Once one of the men – a fellow named Levi like the dealer – died a horrible death from a stomach wound. That had hit Christian hard because they had always been together. They had talked about their homes. If a man you know as well as that so much as moans suddenly, it

comes so damned close to one. The son of the tavern-keeper had been with Christian in the trenches. When it was all over he had said: 'Well, so the Jew came through too!' Those two occasions at the front and the time in Wilhelm's kitchen were the only times he had heard that word.

To Wilhelm Nadler it seemed a natural thing that Christian should seek opportunities to repay him for his many kindnesses. He actually thought the poor fellow came to his aid because he needed a strong man like himself to cling to. Wilhelm's pride shed a halo over the entire family: he had been elected chairman of the group known as *Vaterländische Land Bevölkerung*, which included not only the village but the country round about. To the astonishment of his neighbours, the postman now brought Nadler many letters and notices. Once a week, as representative of his *Verein*, he went to the hotel by the lake where all met and passed resolutions. This place was frequented as a rule only by excursionists from the German Officers' Bund and by executive groups of the Stalheim. No farmer had ever attended. This was the first time there had been meetings of representatives of the rural population. Wilhelm had always hated his civilian life. But now, after listening to the men about him, he began to look upon it as a sort of extended leave which might come to an end any time now. He would soon be called up for duty, not just for ordinary manoeuvres of the kind they now held for the village youths who had not been in the war.

Many visitors came to the pastor's house in the New Year, particularly when Ebert died and the choice of the new Reichs president made it necessary to hold two elections in succession. Freiherr von Ziesen, as a guest, always sat behind the pastor's writing table. Through the filmy curtains the pastor's daughters kept so immaculate he could see his own house across the lake. On the writing-table a vase held the first thin branches of laburnum. Behind the pastor's head hung Albrecht Dürer's painting of Luther: 'The great man,' Dürer had written at that time, 'who saved my soul from deep misery.' In his own misery Herr von Ziesen thought to himself that this was just the sort of a parsonage he had pictured to himself. He opened his heart.

'Of course I am bound by my comrades' decision. But are not my people better off under Ludendorff than under this man, whose name is almost unknown, that my party has put up?'

'I know nothing about politics,' said the pastor. 'You must do what your conscience tells you.' Later he added: 'Farmer Nadler -

perhaps you know him too - has brought me a bottle of home-brewed Schnapps. Will you permit me?"

His wife, it is true, had forbidden him to open the bottle before Easter, but the important visitor was a welcome excuse. Ziesen said to himself:

'The National Socialists have nominated Ludendorff. I never bothered much about them before. Their leader, Adolf Hitler, was in jail two years ago because of the fuss he stirred up in Munich. I've always said: what good can ever come out of the word Socialism - even when it calls itself national? But now that Ludendorff is with them - well, I don't know what to think.'

A few weeks later Ziesen sat in the same chair in the same room: he was offered the same Schnapps. In the meantime everything had been settled: world conditions and his conscience. The Rightist bloc had nominated Hindenburg, in whom everyone had as much confidence as in Ludendorff. There was more to be said for Hindenburg: an old man, an old soldier, not the leader of a new party with an awkward name that made a man wonder which side he was on. The pastor told Ziesen about the village schoolmaster. He had recently come to the parsonage for the first time - he attended church only when he was obliged to come with his pupils. Another of those bewildered hotheaded young men, ripe to drop into the Social Democratic net. And he would have dropped, too, had they not nominated Marx, the man from the Centre - that was too much for him.

The pastor's eldest daughter interrupted the conversation. Shoemaker Nadler had brought the newly mended Sunday shoes. She showed him in to receive his pay. Christian walked in modestly, almost humbly. The pastor had already told Ziesen about the nice young fellow who had been badly wounded in the war and was now obliged to mend shoes. As if he were ashamed to speak of such trifling matters, Christian managed to get out, with much embarrassment, the fact that he had taken the liberty of raising the Fräulein daughter's heels a little on the side so that she would not run them over so quickly. Ziesen always liked to get some angle on the way the people were voting. As Christian was trying on the young lady's shoe, Ziesen interrupted:

'You're going to help us elect Hindenburg on Sunday, of course, Herr Nadler?'

Christian looked at the guest's boots. They were far too expensive for any of his usual customers, but they would undoubtedly need his services one of these days.

'Of course, *gnädiger Herr!*' he replied.

Next Sunday after church Christian actually went to the 'Eiche', where the polls were held. The first thing that caught his eye as he entered was a huge picture of the Field-Marshal – as if there could be no question of a choice. Later that evening the Field-Marshal was destined to wander out of the polling booth into Wilhelm Nadler's kitchen, so much did he admire that picture. Wilhelm now sat on guard at the booth. He had just finished giving a good beating to a number of suspicious characters who were scattering leaflets.

As he stepped before the urn, instead of dropping in his vote, Christian Nadler crumpled it in his hand and slipped it in his pocket. He knew that his brother had taken down the names of all who had come in to vote. He would then carefully draw a line through the voting list so that the names could be read off in the order in which they were thrown into the urn. The last couple to vote were old Wulli and his crotchety wife. Because her name was not covered by any other papers, since Christian's vote was missing, they said that evening that the stupid woman had not yet understood that women had the vote and had thought her husband's vote counted for her too.

v

Ever since Becker had thrown out the servant girl who had had her hair cut off because she had flirted with a Frenchman, his standing in the kitchen had risen to even greater heights. His employers had approved his action and his prestige was now such that he was consulted on every point. On his recommendation his employers engaged a new housemaid, Emma, the sister of Berta, a maid in the household of Director Schluetebock in the Taunus Villa. Schluetebock was a business friend of Klemm's as well as a member of the same Party. Becker was having a passing affair with Berta – a pleasant interlude between his other interests in the town, in Frankfurt and in Mainz as well as in the hotels in Wiesbaden. His opinion of Elsa, since she had betrayed him, was of the lowest and he shuddered to think how nearly he had been dragged into marriage with 'that French whore', as he now called her in his disillusion.

The new maid, Emma, was a quiet person; modest, elderly, industrious. She would never start any love affair that would end in shorn hair or permanent waves. Frau von Klemm thanked her chauffeur for his efforts. As a rule she avoided speaking to him; out

of haughtiness, Becker supposed. Actually she still missed the old chauffeur, from whom they had heard nothing since his dismissal.

After several days of service as loyal and devoted as if she had never worked in any other household, it transpired that Emma was deeply religious – this was not a trait Becker had ever noticed in her younger sister, Berta. Emma, however, not only admitted her interest in religion but was inclined to boast about it and, as always in such cases, with an effect on those around her. On Friday, for instance, Emma, as a good Catholic, could not eat meat. She refused beefsteak and ate the remains of the herring salad out of the icebox. This provoked Becker to remark that while he, of course, came from a Catholic background, his mother had not gone to confession for a long time because the priest, as usual, was having a love affair; this time with his mother's sister. The little kitchen-maid said she thought meatless days were meant only for rich people to prevent them from ruining their stomachs. She now had long plaits which she wound round her head, and firm, prominent breasts. Becker knew everything that went on in this house and it did not take him long to realize that such scornful remarks must have come from the young fellow he had often seen the girl walking with of an evening. Becker knew the boy worked in Amoenburg and had fled to the Occupied Zone because he was wanted for something in the Reich. Criminals of that sort felt safe here in the Rhineland under the protecting wings of the Occupation authorities. He made a mental note to get rid of the fellow in a hurry before he ruined that nice little girl.

Emma listened to all their remarks in silence, as if she were not permitted to defend her religion or as if she found defence useless among these people. She even accepted the fact that Friday was a particularly bad day for her because Becker was always teasing her. It was overdoing things to keep every Friday, he said. It made you dull. In the Rhineland Comrades Group they would celebrate the 26th of May each year, of course – the day on which the French shot Schlageter for sabotage. But they certainly wouldn't celebrate it every week. He did not even know what day of the week the 26th had fallen on that year. But that was different, Emma protested. The Saviour had sacrificed his life for all mankind under the prefect Pontius Pilate. And Becker, proud of his knowledge, retorted: 'And Schlageter for all Germany under Tirard.'

Emma shrugged her shoulders as much as to say it was hopeless: Becker thought she could find nothing to say in reply.

The excellent reputation Becker had so long enjoyed among

Klemm's circle of friends did not dwindle away as was the case with most servants who had fought in the war. If anything it increased by a sort of reflection from his employer's importance. Recent transactions in the British Occupied Zone had thrown Klemm together with an industrial Councillor Castrizius, who had a town house in Bonn and a small country estate near Rudesheim. His wife, for whom this house had been built, had been dead many years. His daughter, brought up by a governess, had grown into a young girl with round eyes as bright as cherries. Standing at the window, the old gentleman pointed out to his guest the countryside now striped with the tricolour and speared with vineyards. His great pleasure, he said, was to watch his daughter and his wine growing. Becker knew that his master enjoyed nothing so much as dining with old Castrizius in the evening. He himself was frequently called to the wood-panelled dining-room and invited to sit down with the young men with whom the Councillor and Herr von Klemm had important business. As if he were their equal, they asked his opinion whenever they planned to free one of the men the French had put in prison because he had inveighed against a separatist schoolmaster.

'Who will come with us?'

'I will, of course,' said Klemm's chauffeur.

They lent him a car - Klemm's car was too well known. Two young men arranged for permission to visit the prisoner. When they were forbidden entrance into the narrow court, they opened fire. Becker packed them all into the borrowed car and they roared past the chain of sentries behind the demarcation line. Becker thought it a great joke when, the next day, he innocently drove the French controller into Klemm's factory.

Lest any indiscretion on the part of the members might bring them into conflict with the new law against secret leagues, Klemm confined the membership of his Rhineland Comrades to loyal and dependable men. His Becker was the epitome of loyalty and dependability. Becker had even refrained from boasting in the kitchen that the *Gnädige Frau* had been obliged to serve him tea in his master's study.

In May, 1924, before turning over his post to Herriot, President Poincaré ordered a wave of arrests in the hope of catching a few Germans who had angered him by beating up the Separatists. Klemm was now frequently asked whether his chauffeur was available for a dangerous trip over the frontier to get some man wanted for sabotage after the Separatist *putsch* or the occupation of the

Ruhr. Becker knew all the dangerous frontier crossings and all possible sentry hideouts. At times he was even called into a conference with his own employer in the Castrizius house. Castrizius treated Becker like an equal, just as Klemm did.

On one occasion they hid a young chemist, whom they were particularly anxious to get safely to his destination, in Becker's car. After the success of this attempt, the three met to discuss the trip, this time not in the Castrizius villa but in a garden restaurant. Becker was very proud to see how surprised the landlady was that he was treated as an equal. When a couple of street-workers at the next table gaped at them, Klemm spoke his thoughts aloud:

'Seeing you having a drink with us, Becker, must violate their ideas of a class war.'

'You just have to know how to get the better of that crowd,' said Castrizius. 'We haven't got on to the trick yet. You see, Klemm, we have all worked together as one man against the Separatists. In those days they didn't feel their Fatherland began beyond Moscow.'

Klemm said thoughtfully: 'That's right. But be careful. Those fellows over there are trying that same trick. The Red leaders found that love of Fatherland painful. So they twisted things and made everyone feel they were against the rich - the rich French, this time, who also want to gobble up foreign lands.'

Castrizius did not know Becker as well as his friend Klemm did, and thought it better to continue this dangerous topic when they were alone. He reverted to the subject of the young chemist's flight. His daughter had wept over the enforced separation. He himself thought the order for the arrest had come at the right moment. She was a little in love with the boy. Now she would forget him and look about for the right man.

Klemm asked, laughing, what the right man was supposed to look like.

'Frankly, my dear Klemm,' Castrizius answered, 'you, for instance. I'd like to see you get her. Only, unfortunately, you are married. As you're out of the question, I can speak freely. You have all the qualities that aren't usually found in one man; all the attributes a young girl admires.'

'I'm really sorry,' said Klemm. 'I ought to have met your little daughter seven or eight years ago.'

'She was playing with dolls then.'

'I thought she still was. I must be getting to be an old married man.'

Both men had forgotten Becker. He was listening attentively.

That girl would really be the right wife for Herr von Klemm, he thought. The Herr Councillor is right there. She would have been much more suited to our household than that dried-up woman who can't tell the difference between Rudesheimer and Hocheimer.

While Becker was still turning over this thought in his mind, Herr von Klemm and the Councillor had been discussing another matter.

'I thought at first,' said Klemm, 'there might be something in this Dawes plan for us. It can't be so bad if the French are making such a fight against it.'

'Because anything that doesn't dismember us gets on their nerves. They are not so practical as their Allies. Revenge is not practical in general. The English and the Americans do not want revenge: they want reparations. They want debentures on our railways. And to get that there must be a Reich and people travelling back and forth in that Reich and money for travelling. And all that demands a steady currency.'

As he uttered each thought his round, healthy face took on an expression as if he were savouring an unusually excellent wine. Klemm seldom admired other men, but for Castrizius he had the highest admiration. 'But they still keep the French on our backs,' he protested.

Still wearing that expression of comfortable astuteness, Castrizius answered: 'We haven't cut down our General Staff as much as they want and not even our army. And we are still making too many guns and too few umbrellas.'

The information Becker derived from these conversations he retailed as his own wisdom evenings round the kitchen table. The heavy taxes under which the factory was struggling; preparations, already begun, for the great celebration of the Rhineland's thousand-year membership in the Reich. He was looking forward to that, though he himself came from Westphalia.

'That's a mighty long time, a thousand years,' said the gardener.

Emma now sat among the servants as a stranger. The rest of the staff usually joined Becker in teasing her. To show Becker that she didn't hold with this Catholic nonsense, the cook served fish dishes on Saturdays, so that on Fridays Emma had to be satisfied with leftovers and potatoes.

The trouble that had been brewing came to a head when President Ebert died and the entire Klemm household went to the polls.

'Well, Emma,' asked Becker, 'what did you vote for, herring salad or beefsteak?'

Emma had made up her mind some time before to take a position in a good Catholic household. But she said nothing of her plans because the new position was still uncertain.

The next time he drove Klemm, Becker reported that Emma was the only one in the house who did not vote for Hindenburg. She had cast her vote for the man from the Centre, Marx.

Six

I

KLEMM DROVE to Berlin in his car, while his wife travelled on the night sleeper with their son, Helmut. He met them at the Anhalter Bahnhof. Would Lenore like to go to the hotel first to have a bath and breakfast, or was she in a hurry to reach Potsdam and show the boy her aunt? He now learned that Lenore had expected them all three to stay in her parents' house in the Scharnhorststrasse. She did not intend to go to the Hotel Adlon immediately after their visit. Klemm, therefore, ordered Becker to drive his wife and the child to Potsdam at once. He was not at all displeased to be left undisturbed during the conference he had come to attend.

The drive through the boring Grünewald was like all the roads over which Becker had driven the car through Germany, dotted with memories from his life with Herr von Klemm. He remembered the winter day when he had waited in a strange car, while Klemm and his companions had hastily finished off that fellow they had stopped on the way to Headquarters. Here in the clearing, their own car had had a flat tyre. They had changed to the other car that was to have taken the prisoner to Nowawes. He would like to tell Frau von Klemm some of these stories of adventures with his employer. But young Frau von Klemm never made any effort to talk. He could not picture this arid person with a lover. However, she must have something, or von Klemm would never have fallen for her.

Lenore sat with her arm around her little boy. Becker liked the child, though he never liked to drive the mother. Helmut had unruly brown hair and laughing eyes and was so like his father that it was

easy for Becker to transfer his love for the father to the son. In the rear mirror he could see that Frau von Klemm's face suddenly turned white with excitement. They were driving through a few quiet streets in Potsdam. Lenore said:

'Here we are.'

They turned into a little street with houses set back in gardens. The low-built houses were, as Becker could see, all in need of paint. In many places the plaster had crumbled away. Funny things they had on them - here a figure, there a sundial, sometimes a little round tower with a small oriel. The dead leaves covering the Scharnhorststrasse had not been removed since her youth, thought Lenore. They were just a little less golden, they smelt a little stronger, as if it were already autumn. That shadow in the many-coloured oriel window was surely Tante Amalie, though she was certain to consider waiting for anyone unsuitable and childish. Lenore flung open the car door so quickly that Becker did not have time to get out. The boy gazed curiously at his great-aunt as she came unhurriedly down the steps and welcomed her niece brusquely. But from the way her lips were pressed together in a thin line Lenore could see how eagerly she had waited for her. The boy, Helmut, stared at the strange woman who held his mother by the hand. She was much thinner than old women usually are, and she wore a watch chain hung round her neck and tucked into her belt. Her lips were parted in a curious grimace. She looked down severely on his little head that was as round as a cap, as if she did not approve of the unruly mop of hair. Suddenly she took him in her arms and clasped him to her so tightly that her breast, which was hard and stiff in her high-necked blouse, crackled. That breast, however, throbbed with the same emotion that throbs in the dried breasts of grandmothers that have suckled many hungry children, when they see their grandchild for the first time.

The thought came to Lenore that Tante Amalie had never had a lover: she had spent her life bringing up her brother's children and keeping her brother's household in order. Her heart was suddenly filled with an almost aching tenderness for her aunt. But it was as impossible for her to express this feeling as it had been impossible to kiss the sharp face between the high collar and the high-combed, grey hair.

Becker, meanwhile, was trying to think up an excuse to return to Berlin as quickly as possible. Herr von Klemm was waiting for him. 'Then let him go,' cried Tante Amalie. Lenore remembered her aunt's habit of speaking to servants in the third person. As the car

drove away she breathed a sigh of relief, almost as if she feared the chauffeur might have taken her back with him. When the front door squeaked shut behind her, Lenore felt as if the walls of her old home closed in tight around her locking out the experiences and the mistakes of many years. Her childish joys and sorrows seemed to have clung to the silver and the furniture, her father's framed decorations and the sewing things. She felt an affection for them again as if they were part of the room.

Tante Amalie refused to allow Lenore to help her. As she had no maid she herself brought in the coffee and the pound cake she had baked the day before. Lenore's delighted surprise exceeded even her expectations. Her niece ate as greedily as her little son, as if the many cakes that were always being served in her house on the Rhine were made of so much dust.

After breakfast they went up the stairs which, yesterday, Tante Amalie had polished on her knees in honour of her guests – above all in honour of little Helmut, the heir to her family and her eldest grandson. Lenore ran her hands lovingly over the yellow brass knobs on the landing. Her aunt had done well to expend so much effort on these stairs that led to her childhood's room, to the inviolable sanctuary of memories. When she saw once more the gay print on the wall – the shooting of the Schiller officers that used to be her favourite picture – a flood of long-forgotten things rushed into her mind.

The sleepy little boy was put to bed in her own old bed under the Schill'schen officers. It was a little short, but Tante Amalie was bent on using this bed she had so carefully preserved.

The moment she was alone, Lenore lay down on her own bed. It was narrow and hard; but suddenly she was as calm as in her girlhood days, filled with the indifference of young people to the injustices of life which they know only from the talk of grown-ups who usually exaggerated everything. Her aunt's profile crossed the wall like the huge shadow of a giantess, like the outlines of her harsh and stern life which, as a child, Lenore had first made fun of, then despised and later forgotten. Now she would like nothing better than that her aunt should turn the key in the door of this little house, and lock her in. She could stay here protected from the memory of the house reflected in the Rhine; from the soft air and the pale wavering, never firmly etched colours; from her husband, ironical and gay; even from the vanished lover whom, at the beginning of her journey, she had hoped to find here again in Berlin. She never wanted to see him again, nor the books which, on his

advice, she had bought. This brusque, stern Tante Amalie was the one person she really loved. In her there was more honesty than in all the idle talk and pretentiousness in which she had been entangled for so long. Here her little boy could become a man; perhaps a man like her father. She was shocked to find herself thinking: not like his own father. 'What have I against Klemm?' she wondered. 'I was certainly head over heels in love with the man in the field hospital and later, for a moment, I was just as crazy about Lieven as I had once been about Klemm. It has taken me a long time to discover that Klemm likes to play the lord and master and to be the centre of everything. He wants a brilliant, glittering life. Tante Amalie's shadow protested: 'You brought it on yourself. Now stick to it. What did you imagine? That you would go travelling about the country with a strange lover? Now stay with your husband, bring up your son to be a decent human being - then you have done something worth doing.'

She was surprised when, the next morning, she saw the little Malzahn who had married her brother the year before. The shy, fresh-faced Ilse, whom she had known only in pigtails and short much-washed dresses, was now a grown-up person with shining eyes and the suspicious, pointed face of a pregnant woman. Her husband's regiment was stationed in Hanover, so Ilse had come home for her confinement. Proudly she showed her sister-in-law bundles of woollen things, all knitted and crocheted beforehand in blue, because blue was for boys.

Tante Amalie lent Ilse the cradle in which her own brother had lain and then his son, Ilse's husband. It was laughable to think that full-grown men, even men already in their graves, had lain in cradles. Little Helmut was a wild, untamed child, typically a Klemm. The son now so eagerly awaited would be like his family, the Wenzlows.

In the night Tante Amalie wakened Lenore to tell her, in deep depression, that the little Malzahn had been confined, but had given birth to a daughter. When Lenore hurried over to the next-door house, she found her sister-in-law healthy and well, but almost apologetic. 'It's all very well for you to try to comfort me,' she said, 'but you have a son.'

'The next time you'll do better,' her mother said.

Lenore was suddenly ill at ease. It was so obvious that a son was wanted and would have been welcomed.

'But where will the sons come from if no mothers are born?' she asked. And she showed such marked tenderness for the little baby

that her brother, returning to Potsdam for the christening, teased her.

'It seems to me I'm the only one who is really glad about her,' Lenore answered earnestly. She had not liked the timid glance Ilse had given her husband on his arrival, as if she were asking him to forgive her for not producing the longed-for son. And she felt an even stronger uneasiness about her surroundings for which she had always longed since she knew no other, no better in her world. Secretly she watched the young wife, well and laughing again, charming in her gay, freshly starched summer dresses. Lenore's brother did not hesitate, even before his sister, to kiss his wife passionately at times.

Klemm was just as relieved as his chauffeur to be able to spend his time undisturbed in the Berlin hotel.

Castrizius had come from Bonn at almost the same time with his merry young daughter. He pleaded the Rhineland question with Klemm and with Director Schluetebock. In Schluetebock's kitchen and from his servants Becker had for some time, as the result of their many trips to that house, been as well posted as his master about stocks and reports. The three men had come here to meet with industrialists from all parts of the Reich and acquaint themselves with the various measures made necessary by quickly changing events. Their strip of land along the Rhine was still in the hands of the enemy: neither Locarno nor Geneva had changed that. Membership in the League of Nations did not make the war preparations any more palatable; they had to be dug up out of railways and custom duties and large industries. Employers could not extend the eight-hour day – it was protected by law. With fewer workers, they were called on to produce more work; they had to buy new machines to keep up to top production marks in order to furnish more material in spite of less manpower.

In these conferences, as in their beer evenings and afternoon teas, Castrizius was the centre of interest. Just why would be difficult to explain; probably for the same reason that in every group there is always a centre around which everyone gravitates. Castrizius was not one of those men who always have the last word. That was one more reason why both big and small business men did not hesitate to crowd his hotel room. With soft words, which they attributed to his Rhenish tongue, he attacked government representatives, the military, his own colleagues. His hair was pure white – his daughter could have passed for his granddaughter. He complained, laughing, that he was twice a widower, but at the same time warned women

against setting their caps at him in the hope of a marriage that would be brief. Men like Herr von Stinnes and von Krupp and von Wolff were glad to leave matters in his hands: he put over many things cleverly, powerfully, just as he did at home with working-men's delegations and with the industrial council. Afterwards he would say: 'I need clever men in my business who can handle my new expensive machines properly. Today if a working man is clever, he fights for his position and leans to the Left. If, therefore, we lock out the Leftists we only harm ourselves. We must think of some other way to keep them at our machines. A German worker cannot help working honestly: it goes against the grain with him to do slovenly work. We need the right man with a clever programme to keep them in our factories and yet not let them get out of hand.'

Before leaving Berlin Castrizius gave a dinner which, he said, was just for a few special friends. He had taken a suite at the Adlon, which included a salon that lay between his and his daughter's bedrooms. The daughter, Nora, was now eighteen. He had engaged a governess years ago to take the place of the girl's dead mother, and he was grateful to her as he watched his daughter prepare for the reception. One thing he had insisted on: his daughter must learn how to take her place as hostess in her father's house – how to welcome guests, to play tennis, swim and ride. She must know everything about housework too. Servants would only obey a mistress who knew from experience how things should be done.

Each guest was delighted to know that he was counted among the Councillor's special friends. This was equally true for the two old generals, and the lieutenants from the Freikorps, for the artist from Bonn and the lawyer, as well as for the editors of the *Woche* and the *Deutsche Zeitung*. Klemm had asked his wife to break off her visit to her aunt and move into the Adlon on the last night so that they could go to the dinner together. He watched the Castrizius daughter as she served Schnapps and handed round cakes, a gay little thing with her cheeks flushed with excitement. It struck him that this child knew more of the world than his own wife. He drank a great deal more than usual so that she might pour it out for him and look up at him with her laughing brown eyes.

Lenore smoked in silence. Her expression was weary and indifferent, because at the moment there was nothing to bring a light in her eyes. She looked from one face to another; at the gilded epaulettes and well-clad shoulders. Once, she thought, she had nursed and bandaged all these men; then they had been groaning and bloodstained.

A belated guest came in and was greeted with cries of pleased recognition. Her own husband rushed towards the door.

'I was beginning to fear you had forgotten us,' Castrizius said. 'In any case we have not forgotten you. You helped us to straighten out things that time in Bielefeld.'

Klemm had run into Lieven at Café Kranzler . . . a propitious visit for Lieven, as Klemm had paid the bill. Lieven had spent almost all of his pay. He had been forced to take the position Gleim's brother-in-law offered – agent and salesman for electric signs. The illuminated-advertisement company was in some way connected with an electric firm that had something to do with Frau von Gleim's family.

At first Lenore did not recognize Lieven because a crowd had gathered round to speak to him. In the last few days, moreover, she had completely forgotten the man of whom, up till then, she had thought almost constantly. Lieven himself had not given her a thought since their last meeting, but, when he saw she did not know him, he felt a pang of annoyance. Then she said, in that mocking tone he recognized instantly:

'Why, there you are, Lieven! I did not know you.'

Had he changed so much? he asked.

'No, but if one has changed oneself, one sometimes does not recognize the people one has known.' She could not have thought of an answer to hurt Lieven more.

A few minutes later he was called away by comrades eager to exchange war experiences. The guests at this party felt as if they were on an island in the devastated, brutalized city. They praised their hosts, the Castriziuses, father and daughter. Someone asked Lieven if he knew Frau von Klemm.

'Very, very well,' Lieven replied, dropping his eyes, and his tone of voice left no question as to their status. He hoped that someone would tell Klemm. He hated him now because he so obviously held his wife's affections.

The next morning Becker was delighted to drive Herr von Klemm back to the Rhine with old Castrizius. The Castriziuses' daughter preferred to drive in her own car with her own chauffeur. She took with her, her governess, Frau von Klemm and the latter's little son.

Castrizius was now so accustomed to Klemm's chauffeur that he did not hesitate to talk freely in Becker's presence.

'You certainly remember, Klemm, from your schooldays, about the early Christians. They were, as their name denotes, extremely Christlike in spirit. Catacombs and things like that. Must have been

very uncomfortable people for a Roman Minister of the Interior to deal with . . . until an emperor hit on the idea of making Christianity a government religion and, for a change, began to hang a few heathen on the Cross.'

'I once read somewhere,' said Klemm, 'that those Christians were never the same after that.'

'Well - what difference does it make? You, for instance, don't have Martin Luther's worries. You have no desire to post a proclamation on Mainz Cathedral. I'm always wondering whether it wouldn't be better to declare Socialism a government religion, as they did in Russia. In that way you could keep it from undermining and ruining the country.'

At this point Becker asked permission to stop at a petrol station.

'Splendid fellow, your Becker,' said Castrizius.

Becker hurried the job as fast as he could: he was glad to listen to the opinions of the two men instead of hearing the gossip of women and children. He hoped to discover from that conversation just what lay behind the new party, the National Socialistic German Labour Party, which was now rousing the people even in the Rhineland. To Becker true devotion meant following his hero through thick and thin, in his life and in his thoughts. Unfortunately, while he was busy getting petrol, he missed part of the conversation. When he came back Castrizius was saying:

'You have always thought, Klemm, that it would be the same story all over again - only this time without the Jews. I told you in the first place that had absolutely nothing to do with the Socialist gang. The man who leaves all air-vents open in his office is doing just what I do. No action against the industrial council, or against strikes, or against the First of May, but - go right ahead if it gives you any pleasure. Let him call his platform Socialism if he wants to. Let him call it a Workers' Party. The German working man is the most important man in the country - at least, that is my opinion. If you have him with you, you have everything. If the old names mean more to him, well, let's try using the old names. The people are against overthrowing the princes and that was the deciding factor for me. Have you ever seen a genuine Socialist, Klemm, who was against taking property away from anyone? A real Socialist is always against possessions . . . whether it's my factory, your car or your chauffeur's good livery. Everybody must be poor, equally poor.'

'By George, he's right there,' thought Becker. 'That's why our gardener's son was always so spiteful. "In my eyes, Becker," he said,

"you're a regular slave." He said that because he was envious. He wanted me to be as badly off as he was.'

Becker was pleased when they stopped at an inn at noon and all three of them sat at the same table.

II

After the last guest had said good-bye, Lieven lingered, talking with friends in the lift and in the lobby. There was much laughter over the house searches of the past weeks in garages and homes of various comrades suspected of building up forbidden army groups. The Leftist press was full of documents purported to have been discovered. Hauptman Steffen said he had moved on a day's notice to the Eden Hotel. His apartment had been watched. Like all the others he did not believe anything serious could happen to him as long as Hindenburg was President of the Reich.

'This continual yelping in the papers . . . but barking dogs never bite. Once we get set we'll pitch in - and without any warning, either.'

Lieven was hoping that Hauptmann Steffen would invite him to have a glass of cognac, but today they all seemed to have conspired to leave him alone. They were all so busy with urgent matters that they let him go out of the Adlon and cross the Linden without any attempt to stop him. He waited for the motor-bus - he had no money for a taxi. Perhaps Steffen had feared their talk might end with a request for a loan or a recommendation for a job. His clothes were all right, though not of the latest cut, but he had taken good care of them for just such occasions as this reception at Castrizius's. His uniform would have restored his old demeanour; bold, ironical, indifferent to God and man.

Now he stood jammed into a crowded bus that rattled across the darkening city where street lights were coming on faster than the stars in the sky. On battlefields and in danger, in national wars and civil rebellions, he had always been cool and utterly indifferent. Now, he thought, he would have to show an indifference beyond any imagining to compete with this darkening city that cared not a whit whether he perished this very day or whether he took part in its turmoil, in any of its many conspiracies, in its love affairs or its home life. Now the bus rolled through the twilight of a remote street where the street lamps twinkled like fireflies, now through the glitter and glare of cinemas. Lieven had not even enough money for the cinema. As agent for electric display signs, he wore himself

out every month trying to get two or three accounts with what persuasive energy he had left – a proceeding which cost him as much effort as an unusually difficult trick does a magician. Then, when he had money enough to eat once in a hotel and starve till the next first of the month came round, he would neglect his business for days. The fact that an assistant manager had been warned by the general manager to keep Lieven's head above water was the only thing that saved him from being fired.

He left the bus in Steglitz and hurried through a few quiet streets. Lieven had taken a room here because the district reminded him of home. The gigantic city sheltered tall apartment houses and factories, but it also had sections as empty as a village, others that might have been a small town, a harbour village, even a foreign quarter. He was still too poor to afford a room in a house in the street, but he had found one in his landlady's garden house. The steps were waxed, the brass on the railing plated with nickel. It should have been a matter of indifference to Lieven whether he entered a palace or a garden house. But he was so constituted that he could be indifferent only when there were people present to be annoyed. There was nobody in this Steglitz back court, nobody in Berlin as a whole, who cared a penny whether Lieven was indifferent or not.

He walked up the stairs past a couple of children. The big girl stared after the strange lodger, as if he carried a halo of adventure about his head. As he unlocked the door, his landlady came to meet him. She was a fat, elderly mannish creature, with short legs and short hair.

'Herr von Luettgens has arrived,' she said. She had waited up in her kitchen to tell her lodger about the guest whose name she rolled on her tongue with relish.

Lieven was glad not to come home to an empty room. But he was not so pleased when little Luettgens informed him that he would spend the night on Lieven's sofa. He had lost his position with a radio firm, but he was already arranging to go into some scheme or other with a number of his comrades. His friend's sister supported herself by teaching little children gymnastics. They now planned to add a course for children under twelve. Later, boys who showed a marked aptitude would be sent to the big *Sport Verein*. Lieven said: 'What, the babies?'

'Stop your joking,' said Luettgens. 'This is serious. We have lost the unity of body and soul. The ancient races knew the importance of that. While they were still babies in the cradle they had the skulls

and bones of their sons, their priests and their kings, reshaped to distinguish them for the rest of their lives from ordinary men.'

'Really,' said Lieven. He suppressed the joke that came to his mind. His guest had not eaten, so Lieven brought out the rest of his bottle. At least he had satisfied his own hunger with sandwiches at the Adlon. He described the afternoon and the guests. Luettgens listened carefully. After he had had enough to drink, his tongue loosened and he became communicative. While waiting for Lieven, he had rummaged around among the latter's books and the information he had gleaned now poured out like a cataract which Lieven endured with resignation. It was nothing new to him to hear his friends, in their enforced idleness, slip over from the empty, tedious lives into worlds of fantasy as bold and dangerous as their own days were exhausting and unexciting. Luettgens talked of a religious state of the future, a religious state without God. In the godless universal state of the future, believers would be as outlawed and homeless as heretics had been in the Christian universal state of the past. By believers, he meant the bourgeois with their musty Christianity and their old wornout creeds. He took another drink and shouted:

'We need the creeds of unbelievers.'

Lieven said, laughing: 'The Soviet Union?'

Luettgens flew into a rage: 'Dictatorship of the proletariat? That's a dictatorship of tramps - the republic of wild animals and niggers. In my state the rulers are men as free and courageous as you and I. The ten commandments of the godless must be: Thou shalt worship only other gods and not me. Thou shalt kill with lust. Thou shalt constantly commit adultery that thou mayest beget many sons and strong. Only he shall be honoured and revered who obeys this command . . . And it won't be ruled by any of those petty civilians from the Weimar Republic. The rulers will be like you and me; men with force and will-power.'

Lieven listened in silence; at first amused, then bored. Little Luettgens must certainly have had a bellyful of that radio business. Of course it was more exciting to kill with lust than to sell radios.

'Before we start building up the republic of the godless,' said Lieven, 'let's get some sleep.'

Luettgens kept on talking for some time. His thin, boyish body danced, naked, around the room. Not did he stop preaching till at last he lay quietly on his back. Suddenly he sat up with a start: 'I say, are there bugs in your sofa?'

Then he quieted down, scratched himself and after that there was silence.

A faint ray of light from the rooms across the court still fell into the room. Luettgens was asleep at last. In the old days Lieven could sleep through even machine-gun fire. Now he lay with wide-open eyes, smoking a cigarette. In that darkened room the thought of life as it dragged on day after day seemed to him intolerable. It was a long time since he had known any pleasures: life was empty of all surprises. In the long run a man could not keep dragging this dreary life round with him. Sooner or later he must come to grips with it, master it. The afternoon at Castrizius's had been boring, the sandwiches boring, the cocktails boring, even the flapper daughter was boring and the friends who made such a fuss over him in the clubs and group meetings, but held aloof in the Adlon because his suit was not the right cut. Even Klemm had not been the same as of old – oh, he was fed up with the whole business!

Whom could he hold on to? On whom could he depend? Which group should he try to join? True, he liked best of all to be alone, but obviously that was no longer possible – unless one lived like his cousin Otto on his own land and property. Yet even that land was no longer his own: even Otto had needed connections to help him. And even this disgusting position that kept him from starving he owed only to his connection with a group of men. But where could he find a group in which a man would not die of starvation and disgust and boredom? All those old parties thrashing over and over their old concepts – though what they wrangled about was nothing but straw? The Communists? Not to be considered. It is true that when he was in Russia a few men of the old nobility had gone over to the service of the Soviet Union in fear for their families. But would such a step be worth the surprise it would cause his friends? He disliked all fixed ideas and particularly the fixed ideas these people had cooked up. They took everything you had away from you, they wanted to make a man homeless, without possessions. They stripped him of the last thing he had left – his pride in his name and his descent and his strength. The Nazis? Well, they had their fixed ideas too. They were as rabid about the Treaty of Versailles and about race as the others were about class war. Lively and amusing boys! He had nothing against them, though they were apt to go off at a tangent into the most boring rages about international Jewry. He could quite well understand that the lost war was to blame for his present misery: he didn't care anything about the Jews. He had never known any and he strongly doubted their devilish power. But,

after all, a man might swallow that twaddle if he got his money's worth. It wouldn't be a bad idea, for instance, if he could arrange to join them secretly. That would let him out of the demonstrations and the open political rallies.

In any event he might as well have a look at these people in the next weeks. That did not cost anything. They wouldn't take anything from him. All they cared about was the man himself, what he stood for, a man like himself, with his wit, his daring, his mind, his name. Little Luettgens was already completely sold on them. That was evident from the philosophy he spouted which struck Lieven like a young boy trying to masquerade as a wild, ugly, demoniacal grown-up. In the house overlooking the street, one light after another went out. At last even the slender streak of light on Luettgens's thin, boyish neck disappeared.

III

Wenzlow was without any doubt the poorest tenant in the suburban community where, after his marriage, he had taken a small flat. In the same house lived men from all walks of life: a doctor, a merchant's family, a lawyer and a couple of clerks. All of them enjoyed incomes from their professions and from their family fortunes that were much larger than the slender monthly pay on which the Wenzlows were obliged to manage. If they wanted to entertain guests or contribute to a public celebration, the Wenzlows were obliged to cut down on their scanty meals for days. Wenzlow's orderly came from a carpenter's family: he helped the young wife furnish the plain little flat so attractively with cheap furniture that Wenzlow was exceedingly proud when his comrades praised his home and his wife. She was still often called 'the little Malzahn' and had grown into a pretty, good-natured little housewife. She was exactly the right wife for Wenzlow, as Tante Amalie had hoped when she witnessed the first kiss from the kitchen window. Frau von Wenzlow was courteous to the many young mothers in the same house, but she never visited their apartments and received in her own only the wives of her husband's brother-officers. Her child, she was convinced, was different from the other children who played or were sunned in their prams in the public gardens. This child would one day be the wife of a different sort of man; the mother of different sons. Just as her own husband's mother and his aunt and her own mother were fundamentally different from these women about her. She praised lavishly (though with private sarcasm) the amazing

toys and clothes the other tenants were able to afford for their children, things wildly beyond her own means. She herself, her husband, and their child in its perambulator had no possessions save their good name which no one could take from them. That name had been theirs for centuries. It had come to a man in ancient days as a reward of honour and courage, and it obliged those who bore it or who were some day to bear it, to maintain that same high standard of honour. That meant being ready at any moment to give one's life for the most precious thing on earth – the Fatherland. If anyone had asked the little Malzahn what the Fatherland was – but of course no one did ask her – she would certainly have replied that it meant people of the same blood that flowed in her own tiny, supple, clean body, to her it meant people who understood by honour and right what she herself understood; who spoke the same language in which her husband whispered tender words to her, received orders and commanded his soldiers . . . a race of people of which all those like her husband and herself were the heart and sinews. She would have despised and doubted anyone who did not share these thoughts just as a grain of corn would despise the straw if it claimed that one could make bread from it too. However, she seldom came in contact with anyone who would have tried to give her other ideas; for the social group in which she had lived from childhood was hermetically sealed within the greater society of mankind.

Wenzlow ought to have been a happy man. He had the wife he wanted; she always looked well; she never bothered him with foolish whims; she took care of his home and his child gladly and untiringly. He was liked both by his superior officers and the men under him; he kept aloof from quarrels, vexations and discords. He was strict in his military service, which he held to be his duty. And his conception of duty he gleaned in his leisure moments from diaries of field-m Marshals and officers of bygone days, men who had made the Fatherland what it had been up to the time of the first World War. After that, Wenzlow thought, traitors and fools had wrecked the country.

He had recovered much more quickly than his wife from his disappointment at having a daughter for his first-born. Not only did he like the baby because she was amusing to watch: he felt for the child a tenderness which he himself could not explain and which was certainly not in line with the prescribed emotions. When, as a joke, his wife put the child in his arms, he was delighted. From that squirming little body came a stream of new, inexplicable life, something quite different from what he had usually understood as life

and certainly not a feeling of exaltation like fame and honour. He did not waste any thought on it: he merely loved to feel the little head and the little feet that kicked so wildly against his chest.

He could have been happy if he had not been tormented at times by the memory of his father. That father had fallen honourably on the battlefield. He had given lustre to the name which Wenzlow himself bore so proudly. But, for many years before the war, his father had lived at home, an officer retired at an early age. And, because of his presence, Wenzlow and his sister, Lenore, had often hated their home. Their father's moods, his constant complaining presence around the house, had made their childhood unbearable. The son had started his military career at just as early an age. So far he had been promoted from rank to rank in due course. Malzahn had been right to persuade him to join the Reichswehr. Reduced though their corps was, it stood even more than in the old days as guarantee that the old concepts of honour and duty were not lost. The opportunities for promotion were less than ever now. There was no war in prospect in which a man could win promotion for exceptional valour. Even if Hindenburg were President of the Reich, he was too old to overthrow the system and to summon the right men to his side. The present Germany was taking on new life at the League of Nations. It made treaties right and left; it urged equal rights, instead of taking its place as leader. That meant a rapidly dwindling army, and consequently less prospect of promotion and early retirement.

Wenzlow had enough good sense not to fool himself. He knew his own worth and his own failings. He was a good officer, a model in the fulfilment of his duties, but he could claim scarcely any other outstanding qualities that would warrant the hope of an extraordinary career or unforeseen promotion. Not even old Spranger – the friend of his dead father and of his father-in-law who had once successfully interceded for him – could obtain any sort of promotion to the Staff or to the Ministry of War. Like his father's, his path would simply come to an end, even in a regular army. Would he then, like his father, spend his life grumbling around the house, a horror to his family, to his wife and this tiny daughter and to the children who might come after? Pride of name and honour were not enough to solace one in grey days. He was, of course, still too young to visualize the irrevocable loss of youth or the ultimate end of existence in obedience to a higher law; though he did glimpse such possibilities in moments of rare depression at night. These thoughts he kept from his wife – he barely admitted them to himself.

He had always shied away from strong emotions, just as now from a reprehensible attack of melancholy. To consider that his career would come to an end, or even to fear it, was almost the same as renouncing one's allegiance. He fought down his dismay, hiding it like a secret pain, even from his old friend Stachwitz, who had been transferred to his garrison in the last year.

As a child, Stachwitz had lived nearby in the Scharnhorststrasse. Though he was rough and untamed, the youngest of a throng of brothers and sisters whom their sickly mother could not control, for some incomprehensible reason Tante Amalie had liked him better than the other boys. For equally incomprehensible reasons the wild little lad had taken Tante Amalie's scoldings and obeyed her. Wenzlow and Stachwitz had been together in the Cadet corps, Stachwitz entering on a fellowship. Later in the war they lost sight of each other on the various fronts. Wenzlow once heard a rumour that his friend had been prevented almost forcibly from committing suicide when the Kaiser fled to Amerongen. At the time he had been unable to picture Stachwitz in such a state of despair. And yet, despairing himself, when he thought it over it did not seem so incredible after all. The very thing that had kept Stachwitz going all these years had now collapsed.

Since then Stachwitz must have come to terms with the new government and the possibilities it offered him. Like Wenzlow, he must have found someone to smooth his way. Be that as it may, he had landed up in the same garrison and they picked up their old friendship where they had left off. Soon he was dropping into the Wenzlow apartment, uninvited and unannounced, as often as he felt inclined. He was not, however, nearly so well liked in the corps as Wenzlow. As of old, Wenzlow often had to help him out of a mess. Sometimes the mess was the result of quarrels, love affairs or debts; sometimes he was in trouble for undue severity or for negligence in his official duties. He made no effort to control his temper. Compared to Stachwitz, Wenzlow was calm and sedate, always concealing any trace of anxiety. However heedless as Stachwitz was in most cases, he kept determinedly away from factions and discussions. When General von Seeckt invited the Hohenzollern princes to be his guests at the Reichswehr manoeuvres, he was removed from his post. Wenzlow had forgotten the old rumours till one evening in his apartment when Stachwitz said:

'I don't see why you're making such a fuss about him. He ought to have been removed . . . though not for what the government and the ministers think. Why risk your own career for those princes?

Why cling to a monarch who of his own free will ignominiously ran away? We were once ready to shed our blood for them. They renounced us.'

'Of his own free will or not,' said Wenzlow, 'the fact remains that under their name we became a mighty empire. The lower classes can never understand a symbol because they have never shared the emotions it arouses. We cannot allow our symbols to be mocked because individual men who once represented them have tossed them aside.'

'We shall get newer and better ones,' said Stachwitz, 'and men who will embody them.'

'When? What men?'

'I don't know yet,' said Stachwitz. 'I'm looking round and bidding my time. Who knows but today the right man may still be walking behind his plough, or standing in a factory. Perhaps tomorrow he will stand on the parade ground among the troops. We need him, therefore he is there.'

Wenzlow shook his head, laughing:

'Plough, factory! Why not a cashier's window or a bench-vice?'

'Yes, why not? I ask you, too.'

'Because Otto the Great was the son of Heinrich the Fowler?'

'Why not?'

'Because a throne is a throne. A throne is not a plough and not a banker's desk. It has been exalted from on high and from on high someone has been set upon it.'

Stachwitz walked over to the window. He looked out at the cheerful autumnal little suburb as if he were seeking for his man in the masses of gay-coloured asters and brownish leaves. How much easier it is to see what is wrong with one's friend than with one's self, thought Wenzlow. Stachwitz is just my age. The years between us and retirement are flying past. He wants something to change all that and to give us security for the future.

Stachwitz's moods were always so mercurial that by supper time he was very gay and ready for all sorts of jokes and pranks. He even modelled out of bread the comical little figures with which, as a small boy, he had always been able to disarm Tante Amalie.

IV

Marie found it difficult now to remember her anxiety of the past years when she had felt as if an evil power were seeking to prevent the birth of her child and later, when the baby came, as if that

malicious power begrudged her child his life. This feeling had indeed for a long time gone to the opposite extreme. It seemed now as if no harm could come to her son. Many a time she had seen him come home with his clothes torn and his face bloody; for, from his earliest years, he had preferred the courtyard to the kitchen and fighting with other boys to playing at home. She was not even alarmed when he was carried in practically unconscious after a blow that had only just missed his eye. She washed the blood away as calmly as if she knew in advance that the power of evil had been dispelled, once and for all. The lad had a sharp, pointed little face. He did not laugh and cry as readily as other children of his age. Instead, he seemed to be watching carefully as if waiting for the right moment. Geschke was surprised to see that Marie took almost better care of his bigger children than of her own. In her heart she thought it much more likely that something might happen to those children who were not born under the protection of a good star than to her own boy who was secure from harm.

One day at noon the little fellow came home weeping. Marie did not even get upset when he was taken ill. She still could not believe that any harm could come to that thin little body, now all covered with red spots, which held within it something dearer to her than her life. She was not quite so undisturbed when he gave scarlet fever to all three children at the same time. She felt guilty when Geschke said:

'Your boy was the one who brought it home. Now they all have it.'

He had never said 'your boy' before – the strange child among his own.

Her own boy was the first to be taken off to the hospital. She ran out on the balcony and watched the ambulance drive off into the city that now seemed to her as wild and impenetrable as the sea beside her island home. Into this desert waste of stone and drifts of smoke her child had now vanished. She did not weep, but now she knew, without any doubt, where her heart lay. She could tell the precise place between her ribs because of the dreadful pain. She stared into the city at high noon. How the cars rattled and honked! What a hurry all the people were in, so eager to get to a certain place at a certain time! Somewhere in that stony pile lay her child, covered with red spots. Staring into the dust of noon, she prayed to God to keep on protecting the child that lay so far away from her somewhere in the midst of that dusty, stony midday life. She directed her prayer to that incomprehensible, ever-present

Power to which the thin, red-spotted little boy belonged, as well as her husband's gruff, familiar face, the face of her lover, long ago faded into the faintly glimmering past, and the faces of Geschke's children.

The next day the oldest boy and the girl were taken away; then the second boy who, at first, they thought had escaped. Geschke went off to work sadly; he came home sadly to the empty flat. As a rule he paid little attention to the children. But now that the house was empty, he realized for the first time how much hope he had placed in them; a vague, unconscious hope, undoubtedly the only hope he had ever set on anything in all his monotonous existence. The two boys and the girl had never meant more to him than a responsibility and now and then someone with whom to pass the time. Now it appeared that the unconscious hope he had placed in those small, unnoticed lives, whose future he could not foresee, were more important to him than his work or his wages, both of which were bound to come to an end some day at some future date. His own amorphous life was regulated to the day of his death. Only in one place, through these little children, did it touch the unknown. The unknown and chance – therein lay his hope. Tonight the kitchen was empty; the food did not taste good; the table was bare. As a rule he went straight to the hospital after his work. A week later he brought his daughter and his second son home; the eldest and the youngest were ill in bed.

One evening Geschke came hurrying home from work. He stopped to pick up a couple pair of socks his wife had knitted that day from the wool of an unravelled shawl. The children's feet, in spite of their fever, were cold. Marie was waiting for him in the dark kitchen. She heard a step on the stairs and something in the slow heaviness of the tread sent a stab through her heart. He did not speak to her as he came through the door, nor could she read anything in his face. So cold and still was he that the air of the room seemed chilled. Marie's jaw stiffened. She tried to moisten her lips, but she could not. Hoarsely she asked:

"How are they?"

Geschke did not answer. As always when he came home he lifted the pot from the stove and put it on the window-sill. Then he ladled out a few spoonfuls for himself. Marie waited with her hands tightly clasped in her lap. Her heart, thumping wildly, bade her: *Ask him*. But another wild thud warned: *Be quiet*. A ray from the street light cut the kitchen in half. Geschke sat on the other side of the light beyond the thin strip of dark across which she could not bring herself

to ask the question trembling on her lips. From the bar below came the sound of the gramophone. Geschke flung his spoon on the floor.

'He is dead,' he said.

Hoarse with anxiety Marie asked: 'Which one?'

Geschke gave her an ugly look. The word was on the tip of his tongue: Mine. Unconsciously he swallowed it, though without any thought in mind, rather out of sheer suffering. She could not see the expression on his face any better than he could read her white face.

'The eldest,' he said.

Marie began to sob heartbrokenly. Geschke watched her for a second from the window. Then he said: 'The little one is better. He can soon come home.'

Marie cried and cried as if she could never stop. At last she burst out:

'Not many children are as good as the eldest boy. My brothers were not nearly so good when they were little. Do you remember the time you sent Lene to bed because she had broken the bowl and had not been punished? Her big brother took her a piece of sausage, do you remember?'

'Yes, yes,' said Geschke. He remembered everything, every detail, the slightest, most unimportant incidents that had made him so proud of his eldest. His own life was not the end, he had thought. Who knew but it would have a continuation in the boy? Now that boy was dead and whatever share the father might have had in his life was gone for ever. He propped his elbows on the window-sill and leaned his head on his hands. And the light from the street still fell across him and still the gramophone mocked. He heard his wife crying as if she would never stop. At last she came over to him and put her hand on his head. As she felt his warm, bristly hair, her fears quieted. Little by little her tears stopped falling. She felt the warm, secret shyness of the life they lived here together, that life into which she had stumbled through some strange chance. She stopped and picked up the spoon. Then she tried to get Geschke to take a little hot soup, but as he shook his head she pulled her own chair up to the window. As he looked at the narrow part in her smooth hair shining in the lamplight Geschke gradually grew calmer. Silently, side by side, they sat together in the dark a long, long time.

Life went on. At first somewhat haltingly, as if it could not quite make up its mind to go the old pace the poorer for hope. Then even that thinner, hopeless life gradually became the life of every day. Hans came home and for some time sat around the house watching everyone carefully. He was not very lively yet and there

were still no points of light in his eyes. He looked like a tired little fox. Secretly he was worried about school: he ought to have entered by this time. He listened to the reports his brother and sister brought home. Marie was secretly worried too. Hans knew nothing of life in the outside world except what little of it came to their flat – his father's work, a few affectionate pats on his head; the way his father went over accounts with his mother when he brought home the week's pay and their anxiety lest he lose that pay altogether and be left without work; the quarrel with Triebel from the flat one floor below; the little box on the plate rack beside the pots in which his mother dropped the coins a boy came to fetch every week. Hans knew beforehand that there would always be a quarrel when Triebel came to see them. Triebel had lost his relief jobs twice. Laughing, Geschke asked him whether he wouldn't have to move to a bigger flat.

'Why?'

'To have room enough to hang up a new picture every time the Russians chose a new president.'

To which Triebel replied:

'Stalin is not the President. He is the Secretary-General of the Party. And he will be for a long time to come. I bet I'll be through long before he is.'

'You will be if you fellows keep on as you're doing.'

'If we keep on?' cried Triebel.

Then the fight was on. Hans listened and sucked his licorice stick. To himself he pictured Black-Red-Yellow as something colourful and the Red Front Fighters League as something colourful too. He saw his father who smelt of tobacco and Triebel who spat from excitement when he talked. Also his mother who was always there as the sun is always present. She never interfered with anyone. If the week's pay packet did not suffice she ran down to Tante Emilie for some home work. That work furnished them with meat. As their father had instructed her she dropped the pennies from her pay into the little box which someone came and emptied, someone Triebel cursed. Hans's mother was very good friends with Triebel's wife. She once brought Hans an apple and told him: 'You must get well now.'

As soon as he was well enough to go out, Marie took Hans to school. The stepdaughter, Helene, who used to look after the little boy on his way to school, now went to a girls' school so far away that she had to take two tramcars to get there. The elder boy, Franz, rushed off with his friends.

Her little son's serious illness had shattered Marie's faith in the inviolability of her boy's life. Hans was embarrassed in front of his friends when his mother seized his hand as if death lurked under the wheels of the omnibus. How miserable he was in the clothes he had inherited from his dead brother! Marie had shortened them, it was true, but they were still far too big for him. And how pale and peaked his little face looked in the morning sunlight! Mother and son trotted along, their hearts heavy with indefinable fears as to what the day might hold. People hurrying to get to work on time shoved and pushed against them. The early morning sun shone on the show windows of stores that were already filling up, on apples and cabbages in the street market, and on red scraps of meat on butchers' stands. The nearer they drew to the school the more children there were in the crowd. In front of the entrance gate there were only boys as if the grown-ups had been sifted out like chaff from the wheat.

At first Hans had been cross because his mother insisted upon leading him by the hand, but now, in this wilderness, he was glad enough to feel her hand in his. The schoolmaster was a very tall man, as thin as a blade that had bent in a few places. He had been badly wounded in the war and still retained a few idiosyncrasies that were extremely unfortunate for one in his profession. He could not, for instance, speak above a whisper and he was frequently obliged to step outside the classroom. Needless to say he made every effort to hide these disadvantages from his superiors.

Marie looked in shocked surprise at his eyes, brown and sad, as if he were resigned to his fate. He sat down beside her in a corner of the window. Marie had lost most of her beauty but her hair still held glints of light above her round forehead and her heavy eyelashes cast shadows on her cheeks. To Schoolmaster Hallstein she seemed very beautiful, almost as beautiful as she had to Erwin in the 'Anchor' restaurant when he was looking for a temporary shelter and had found something much more than shelter - something perhaps for life, if his life had not come to an end so soon. To Schoolmaster Hallstein Marie was beautiful not because of her youth but because she was the mother of his pupil. She was one with him in her desire for her little boy to learn his alphabet in school. The alphabet was the very foundation of the language spoken by Hallstein's wife and his mother, the language of Martin Luther, of Goethe's *Faust*, of his favourite authors, Heine and Kleist. He revered it secretly as the language of Dehmel's *Pogfred*, and even more secretly, as that of Thomas Mann. For the last

few years it had also been the language of Marx and Engels. 'You have brought your little boy to me,' he said. 'The best you have to give.'

Marie nodded, astonished because he seemed to read her thoughts. 'To me,' he said, 'he is the best too - my pupil.'

Marie went home in a happier mood. Hans liked his teacher and because he had been promised a present of a picture from the automatic machine if he knew his lesson, he sat down at the window-sill in the kitchen to learn his A B C. The two boys often quarrelled about which one of them was the favourite of his respective teacher. Marie controlled her annoyance because the older boy, Franz, learned much more from his teacher than Hans did from his. Geschke would never talk with his sons' teachers: he had neither the time nor the inclination. Franz had long since outgrown the period when his father and mother had to worry about his attendance at school. He was very proud of all the schools which, as he was often told, his Party had established all over the land.

When they all sat together at meals in the kitchen, Marie sometimes thought: 'Can it be possible he has got over his son's death?' And Geschke thought: 'She has already forgotten the boy's death - perhaps because, after all, he was not her own.' There had been a brief period of unemployment, but Geschke was now working again. That meant enough to eat, the ability to buy little things they had done without, here a shirt, there a brush, that made their home life smoother. The women in the same house often complained and the men cursed. When her neighbours insisted that a person couldn't keep their head above water on the pay they got, Marie generally said:

'You have to make it go as far as possible.'

She had learned that from her childhood, for her own family had been even poorer. The neighbours merely thought her weak-minded, even if she was a good-hearted thing and always ready to help when someone was sick or wanted to borrow anything. Marie's habit of carefully repairing things the moment they needed it had always helped her over hard times.

Geschke was glad to come home to his four walls after a busy, tiresome day. He had long ago forgotten that he had found Marie practically on the street. At the time her youth and beauty had frightened him - he felt he had no right to them. He did not have to worry about that now - she looked like all the other women. Marie had always shrunk from being the stepmother of bad jokes and wicked fairy-tales. She had never made any difference between her

own child and the others. All her daily cares and anxieties were so closely bound up with Geschke that she scarcely had time to think of the past. In every life, she told herself, there is a hidden sorrow that never, or almost never, comes to the surface. Everyone probably has something to conceal – she had her sorrow and Geschke his. Hers was her first love: Geschke's was the death of his first wife, the death of his favourite son.

The girl, Lene, with her dark, flat face, looked like her own mother. The two boys seemed to resemble their dead brother. They were always quarrelling about some toy or other. Marie would separate them with her capable hands that unravelled all problems, be they tangled knitting wool or quarrels. She lent to the older boy, Franz, a pair of scissors with which to cut out the pictures his teacher had given him as a reward. Little Hans watched enviously as Franz made a ship out of stiff paper, pasted it together and hung it over-night by a string to the lamp. The next time he went to school Franz even permitted his mother to accompany him in order to prevent the boys from knocking his paper ship out of his hand. His teacher was going to hang it up in the classroom.

A few weeks later when Geschke and Triebel were quarrelling, Marie recalled the quarrel between the two boys about the paper and scissors. Geschke refused to take the newspaper Triebel was urging on him. He had laughed heartily when the Communists dug up some sort of a popular demand against building an armoured cruiser. If Geschke was against war, Triebel wanted to know, why didn't he vote against it? If the people were all against war, as they contended, why didn't they vote against having this thing built?

'There were better ways,' Geschke said, 'than stupid vote-catching.'

Not so long ago they voted to dispossess the princes. Then, through all sorts of tricks and chicanery, it came to nothing. The people were just getting tired of things that led to nothing. And why did they lead to nothing? Let Geschke ask himself that instead of always repeating like an automaton what his Party big-shots told him.

At this Geschke pointed out calmly that Triebel was a great deal more in awe of his Party leaders, and that was more exhausting for they changed every few months.

'Of course they change, and the struggle remains the same.'

So the argument went, back and forth, till it was reduced to name-calling and party slogans. The more honest they were the more artificial they sounded. Each man had failed to make his slogans

part of himself. He took them fresh out of newspapers and speeches.

Suddenly Marie remembered where she had seen the word 'armoured cruiser'. Not in the newspaper – she almost never looked at it – but on the sheet of paper Franz had brought home from school and had used to cut out the ship with her scissors. She mentioned it to her husband. Geschke pricked up his ears – he always turned grumpy when he was annoyed. Hm! he thought. Franz's teacher certainly knew what he was doing when he had the children cut out that ship. The paper ship was probably hanging in the classroom even now, and later when it was made of steel the boys could clamber about on it. By that time it would seem like an old friend to them.

v

Though Wilhelm Nadler was not blessed with any great power of imagination and certainly not with any understanding of people, as soon as he came into closer contact with Frieher von Ziesen he began telling his wife about the man's opinions and sentiments. He even described the slightest details of his clothes in a way that would have done credit to an artist. Liese did not pay much attention. The only man she had ever heard Wilhelm rave about with such enthusiasm was that Hauptmann Degenhardt in whose brigade he had served after the war until they had been obliged to disband as a result of the failure of the Kapp *putsch*. Let Wilhelm rave on, if he liked! It didn't hurt her own plans for the future and for her farm.

Herr von Ziesen lived over on the opposite shore on the little country estate he had inherited. He was extremely proud of it and spent much time and care on it, though he was not dependent upon any income from it. For Herr von Ziesen had money in the bank. His farm was part of a larger landed estate which his forefathers in their day had sold and mortgaged to the hilt. The whole lake property had belonged to their family in the old days and he hated to give it up even if working the land brought no returns. If in the old days Nadler had been his tenant farmer, he would have been a perfect subject. Under the laws resulting from the religious wars, the feudal lords were permitted to espouse the new Evangelical faith, but their tenants had no choice but to be of the same religion as their masters. Wilhelm had no conception of the doubts and scruples that from time to time so plagued Freiherr von Ziesen that they had once even driven him to the pastor's house. The results of these doubts and scruples came to Wilhelm in the speeches the Freiherr

made at feasts and election days and which Wilhelm so greatly admired. Nadler was one of those men who must have someone to look up to, someone to lead them. He was perfectly at home as a representative of a higher authority which, to be sure, he could never equal, and he was content to act according to its dictates and decisions. Such men, moreover, have the advantage of being spared all the anxious pros and cons that have led to the decisions.

Nadler was never happier than when he was invited to a group meeting in the hotel by the lake; an invitation signed by Ziesen's name, though Ziesen himself was seldom present.

All day long Liese had been happy at the prospect of having Wilhelm as far away as possible for a few hours. For some time she had been wanting to run over and see how her brother-in-law was getting on in his shack. Christian had acquired a good clientele, not only among the villagers but even among the road-menders who were putting asphalt on the highroad that ran along the lake into the moors and through the woods as far as the railway station. He still lent money willingly to his brother, though perhaps when Wilhelm was up to his neck in debts he would sometimes – just for the fun of it – make his brother plead with him a little while. Wilhelm was never out of debt. Ever since his return home he had squandered his money on purchases that made the farmers open their eyes in surprise since he should have been spending the borrowed money on the most urgent repairs. He never balanced his accounts. Liese made a rough estimate that, for instance, the earnings from milk and butter sales would scarcely cover the new butter machine and the expenses connected with it. Wilhelm was secretly worried for fear the harvest would not bring in the amount he had borrowed from the bank, in which case he would have to sell another piece of his field. Not only did he send the cattle-dealer to Christian, he also sent employees from the Berlin factories when the instalment payments fell due. Christian's help was not, however, inexhaustible, any more than the harvest on which he had placed his greatest hope. The only thing that was inexhaustible was labour. The children could be of use only in the holidays; in their free time they did not make up for what the day labourer could have done. Only Liese was capable of that. She was, as they say of peasants, as strong as the earth. But that was not true: Liese was stronger. The earth, bad in parts, middling good in others, produced only just so much, but if it had been left to Liese alone, she would have produced two harvests which would finally have been enough to pay off all creditors. Let Wilhelm curse the government that was ruining its people, let him

curse the Jews, capital, the machine companies. Liese knew swearing did not help. At the most it robbed one of precious working hours. If she intended to keep the children's inheritance for them, she had to dig, dig, dig, capital or Jews, empires or republic, hail or drought, to the contrary. The eldest boy was at home working in the stable; the girl was doing spring-cleaning; the little boy had his lessons and the smallest was not good for much. She and Wilhelm had planned to do some planting as far as the highroad this afternoon, each taking one side of the field. Now Wilhelm had gone off, she would have to plant alone. He would come back too late to do any work, and this was not without its advantage. She flung off her belt to let the wind cool her sweaty, flapping dress. The sweat poured out of her hair in thin rivulets, down over her bright shining eyes as if it could wash away the many summer freckles. Liese was never discouraged: she knew that her bodily strength would never let her down. Firm-boned, tireless and strong, her body was the best of comrades to her. She dug in her spade and pressed with her knees as if she had to dig away all the sins she had ever committed - yes, even all the sins she might ever commit!

She finished earlier than she had expected. The little boy, at her bidding, went home down the main road: she went through the fields along the lake.

Christian had built a new roof in front of his shack. Because it was already late summer he had set up his workshop in the open. He did not have much time to look up from his shoes, but when he stopped hammering for a moment, he liked to hear the water lapping against the piles, particularly when a steamer went by. When he looked up he saw the veil of pale golden autumn light over the lake; the shimmering veil that enmeshed the shadows of clouds and the reflection of distant banks with church steeples and groups of farmers. It caught a plough and a girl washing and even his own three-legged stool on which he was sitting. From childhood he had loved the sea and everything about the water. He was one of those people who feel closer to the water than to the earth. And, at last, through all sorts of byways, through his crippled leg and his own strange habits, Fate had taken him away from the plough to the edge of the sea. As a child he had loved to play ducks and drakes over the water. Suddenly he felt a wild desire to try it again. Just as he laid aside his shoe last, Liese came pushing her protruding stomach before her across the field - though this time she was not pregnant.

'She ought to leave me alone,' he thought. Gone were the days of anger and love and the homecoming of those who had survived the

war. He was just managing to make some kind of a life for himself, to get used to being a cripple for the rest of his days, as a tree struck by lightning must make up its mind whether to die off or to go on living with its shattered branches.

'You haven't made it so bad here,' said Liese.

'Why should I?' he answered.

'But you'll freeze in winter.'

'I've got myself another new stove. The innkeeper's son'll bring me coal. I just have to put up the stove pipe properly.'

He did not offer Liese a chair because he hoped she would go as quickly as possible. As she stood there with her arms crossed over her breasts, he sensed something different in her.

'These past weeks,' she was saying, 'my man has often been glad enough you helped him out of the mess. That jealous bunch in the village . . . they'd like well enough to see things go wrong with us, I just want to tell you: over at our place we can't hear you sitting here on your stool pounding away, but there's something tying us together like a long thread. It makes me laugh.'

He looked down at his work. He saw only a bit of blue-checked skirt before him. The woman was right again. They could not even hear him pounding: he is not really there at all. It was nothing but a thread – and it was a joke.

She went on quietly: 'We got the loan because of the backing. Now we have to pay the interest the moment it's due and that's no fun either.'

He thought: 'Perhaps she wants to borrow from me again.'

'How we're going to keep going without selling,' she went on, 'puzzles me. My man always thinks something will happen. He gets that from the war. In war things can suddenly go wrong: then they can go right again; then suddenly they capture something. With us we have to do it all ourselves: sell the harvest, pay the rent. At first I was glad to get rid of the tenant; then I was glad we found a new one.'

Suddenly she sat down on the ground. He was now above her on his low three-legged stool. She had not put on her belt again. Her eyes were so blue that they made him think of china beads.

'Maybe you'd like to see my house,' he said.

But Liese went on talking: 'My man – he'll always be a soldier. He's only pretending to be at home. I guess he thinks the silly peace will soon go wrong. He thinks the way to get the clover field we need is to set up a machine gun. He can't get it into his head you have to sweat blood. He can't get anything about rents and instalment

payments into his head. If anyone wants to take anything from him – drive a cow away or get him to pay up smartly – he thinks all you have to do is shoot him down.'

'Then you're the right wife for him. You always put your shoulder to the wheel.'

'Yes,' said the woman. 'I want the children to have everything in order. There's no one but me to hold things together till they are big. The minute my man hears a shot, he's up and after it. It's true I've got the whole business on my shoulders.'

A steamer hooted in the distance. Christian and Liese turned their heads. The shadow of an enormous cloud lay half over the sea and half over the moor. Slowly it moved across the sun, far, far away to the edge of the plain where a remote village suddenly appeared in its oblique light, a village forgotten and now, unexpectedly pointing its church steeple like an index finger to the sky. The steamer slowed down just before the next station. Liese and Christian turned their heads away: they looked at each other swiftly as if stealthily seeking reassurance that the other was still there; the impress of their secret thoughts still on their faces. Their glances met and clashed. They looked quickly away. Christian picked up his hammer and pounded several nails: Liese chewed a blade of grass. Right or wrong, the man belonged with her now, this very moment. Only so could she find peace. Nothing else on earth could bring her peace; neither work nor children nor her own husband nor any other man even if he were handsomer and less false than Christian, who was false through and through. Christian understood what she was thinking: he had already looked around to see whether anyone was watching them. He got up as quickly as he could with his lame foot:

'Come!' he said.

The shack smelt of shoes and leather. The floor, even the camp bed, was littered with shavings and scraps: it reeked of the two sorts of glue used for leather and for wood.

When, a little while later, they came out of the shack again, the steamer had crossed the horizon. The slender, ribbon-like wake still lay on the water. Christian settled down again on his three-legged stool and began hammering away as before.

'Good-bye,' she said shortly.

He mumbled something, and she went off across the field.

Seven

I

WEEKS LATER Wilhelm Nadler learned, through the usual grapevine, that his wife had paid a lengthy visit to the boathouse. For several days and nights he fought down the mad temptation to beat Christian to a pulp. In his mind he pictured his brother, hobbling away from his land in despair; he saw the three-legged stool, the shoemaker's last, the many dozens of worn-out shoes, all of them as wretched and misshapen as the shoemaker himself, flying after him. But all this was only in his mind. He had set out once in a wild rage for the boathouse, but at the entrance to the village he met Levi. The cattle-dealer was again hovering around for a last payment. Now Wilhelm had just paid out every penny he could lay his hands on for repairs made by the machine company. When the post failed to bring the desired reply, the company had the pleasant habit of sending an employee regularly to make collections in the country. This was always a man who knew his way about. He was not always the same one; sometimes he had fair hair, sometimes dark; sometimes he was old, sometimes young. But all of them were equally sharp at extracting the last payment, for their salary depended on their success. From whom that salary came, they themselves could not have said. The cashier who paid them was, like themselves, only an employee of the firm. What sort of eyes the firm had, what sort of hair, they knew as little as Nadler. All this Wilhelm heard from the cattle-dealer. The man had been working this side of the lake for years, the same part of the country where Wilhelm had been ploughing for years. Now a man cannot hate or love a bloodless firm or an idea: he needs something tangible. When, therefore, Nadler saw Levi coming towards him, he directed all his hatred at him and got so angry that the blood rushed to his head. Whenever one of the employees appeared, his heart would sink into his boots. But he did not fly into a wild rage when a stranger knocked on his door and, after being admitted, told him he had been sent by his firm to collect. That frightened Nadler and made him sick.

The amount Nadler still owed Levi was, thanks to his brother, only the last instalment on the final payment. The dealer had once

more allowed Christian to persuade him to wait for the remainder. Now, when Wilhelm had spent his last penny on repairs, the dealer said:

'I know your brother too well. He won't leave you in a hole.'

He knew that the farmers were worse off than usual: grain was beyond their means, and the rye was poor. The markets no longer fought to buy butter and eggs and bacon because they themselves were having trouble making deliveries in a Berlin full of unemployed.

'Well, you try him,' Nadler grumbled, and he let the dealer go to Christian in his place. But he was still bursting with rage and had no one on whom to vent it. He went back to the kitchen. Without any warning, like a flash of lightning out of a clear sky, he pounced on the unsuspecting Liese and began beating her.

'What have I done?' Liese screamed.

'You know that yourself, you dirty slut!' he shouted.

Liese knew at once what her husband meant. But she could not understand how after such a long time had elapsed, he had suddenly heard about her visit to the boathouse. When Nadler had exhausted his rage and strength, she went back to the stable and smoothed her hair. To herself she thought: 'God knows what he will do to Christian now. And I can't even warn him.'

An hour later the dealer appeared.

'I told you so,' he said rubbing his hands together with delight. He brought with him a note for Wilhelm to sign. To himself he thought: 'God knows what will come of all this. I'm glad I'm finished with these people.'

When he entered Christian's shack, the latter asked him:

'Have you been to my brother first?' and he gave him a strange look. The dealer told him that Wilhelm himself had sent him. Then Christian had agreed even more quickly than usual to do as he wished.

Christian had known for some time just how his brother had heard about himself and Liese. Farmer Schwalk had gone on board the steamer to visit his relatives from the other end of the lake and had seen them from the deck. He had seen Liese sitting under the roof with Christian and then disappear with him inside the shack. Ever since Christian heard that he had been prepared for Wilhelm's visit. By day he had worked inside the shack with the door barred. That would give him time to threaten his brother the moment he rattled the door. Now, after the dealer's visit, he realized that his brother could not afford to fight with him. Liese probably was not having an easy time of it at home - but it was her own fault, after

all. From such vague reflections his thoughts turned to hard facts. The lease ran out in the autumn. Liese had wanted it herself because she needed the land for the clover. Now she had clover enough, but she could not feed the children on it. Every drop of milk had to go to the central depot for money to pay their expenses. Christian was as unwilling as his older brother to let or mortgage the farm or even a part of it. Like Wilhelm, he felt that the farm was something to leave to the children. When he said 'children' Christian meant a certain little boy his eyes could single out from far across the fields – the only head among them that was so bright a yellow he had been nicknamed 'Egghead' in the village. Just how that head was to receive his own share of the inheritance among that crowd of brothers and sisters, Christian himself did not yet know – only a miracle or a trick could help.

As Wilhelm had been prevented from beating his brother, he began to feel that there could not have been any truth in the rumour. Liese had probably only been hanging about with her brother-in-law; probably they had not gone so far as the gossip suggested. Of course, if they had, he, Wilhelm Nadler, would not have hesitated to throw his brother out. For a while, in fear of her turbulent husband, Liese slept in the same bed with the younger children, but she soon noticed that her fears were groundless. His rage had cooled. It was not long before he gave her to understand that everything could be as it was before.

Though he had ceased to believe the rumours, Wilhelm could not bring himself to leave Liese alone with Christian when he was obliged to go to the city. The bank had already sent two warnings, but he had paid no attention – though this time he had the money for the interest ready. When the final warning came he bethought himself of a way out. There was an old lean-to alongside of Christian's shack that still housed the remains of an old boat. The punt was too far gone to be worth repairing and he had been intending for some time to chop it up for firewood. He now ordered his eldest son to spend the day in doing so and to make a thorough job of it.

Christian Nadler was surprised for a moment when the boy came trotting up with his axe in his hand. On questioning him he learned that Wilhelm was in town at the bank. Then he understood that the boy had been sent to watch him, to make it impossible for Liese to slip into his workshop unseen.

As Wilhelm Nadler left the suburban train at the Potsdamer Bahnhof and walked through a few streets he felt just like any man

who comes to the city after having lived for a long time in a village. The people all seemed to be in such a hurry, racing to some goal or other. At first it seemed ridiculous to him, but soon he found that he was constantly being hindered from reaching his own objective, a square in a distant part of the city. A thin, icy rain drove the passers-by together in swarms. Someone was always getting in his way. He was nervous, too, about asking for a new loan at the bank. That was the real reason why he had been so set on paying his interest punctually. He would have met the full payment on time if it hadn't been for his troubles at home. He looked up at a tall apartment house that had been built since his last visit to the city. The autumn rain was more of a nuisance here than at home and the cold seemed to bite into him. Street vendors crouched, cursing, under their dripping umbrellas. He looked at shops in which he could never hope to buy anything; he read advertisements praising objects whose purpose he did not even know. And still the rain poured down in sharp, icy streams, and still crowds of more and more people kept coming past, all of them as unconcerned with him as he with them. He thought of the time when he had marched into the city with music playing and flags flying. Then he could have chased these crowds of people in any direction he wished - he had carried arms. How they had scattered that time! In a second the huge square was empty.

Wilhelm stopped in front of a bulletin board where a dried-up little old man was tearing down pieces of paper. He then smeared glue from his pail on the old placards and pasted something new over them which he would have to tear down the next day - a funny kind of job! And it was a funny thing, too, that here, in the city, they were tearing down the very placard that was still new in his village. There he himself was the one to decide how long a placard should hang in a certain place. The villagers at home had just begun to stare at this one in surprise. Here the townspeople all knew what it said. They knew all about 'the enslaving of the German people'; all about the Young Plan. And they shook their heads and hurried past, driven by their haste and the rain. They had been angry enough when they first heard that their children and their children's children would have to pay for sixty years for something of which they were innocent. For all these people considered themselves innocent. The war had been over now more than ten years. The hearts of all these people running in all directions, all drenched to the skin, were filled with confused emotions: anger and grief, hope and hunger, but no sense of guilt. They stared un-

comprehendingly at the figures which, like those in the inflation had once been used only in reference to the starry firmament. Now they themselves were supposed to produce those astronomical figures. The day had scarcely begun and they were already weary. It was not yet winter, and they froze. The rain was only a drizzle, yet they were already wet to the skin. The dried-up little old man went off to the next corner with his glue and his brush and new placards.

Nadler paid his debt at the bank. He did not, however, have an opportunity to talk about the loan, which had been the principal reason for his trip to the city. Either the clerk he wanted to see was really out or he was just putting him off because he did not want to do business with him.

Now that he was free at last, Nadler decided to have a glass of beer. If he went home at noon, he would get there just after the boy had finished splitting the wood. But a few streets farther on he met a comrade, the former Sergeant Struwe. Struwe was now doorman at a department store. He met the customers as they stepped from their cars and held a huge coloured umbrella over them. As he was returning from one of those trips he ran into Nadler. He persuaded him to wait for him in a nearby bar until his relief man came.

As he sat there waiting for Struwe, Nadler thought comfortably that Liese was at home now ahead of him, looking after the cooking and the milking. By this time of day he himself would have been almost ready to go to the village tavern. Struwe came coughing and slapping his arms. His beard was dripping wet. Nadler thought enviously: he hasn't changed much.

The doorman's livery with its many buttons looked like a uniform, and gave Struwe a familiar, almost homelike appearance. He insisted upon standing Nadler treat. Struwe had always had a touch of lordliness. He now had a wife and a brood of children. It had been fairly easy for him to get a position, with his good appearance and his recommendations. They drank and talked of their old comrades. Struwe persuaded Nadler to go with him from the bar to a meeting at the Sportpalast. He, Struwe, wouldn't go home straight away now. It was a mistake to get the women used to it.

'Oh, that fellow!' said Nadler referring to the speaker of the evening, whom Struwe was praising lavishly; 'a little fellow, but he's something, I tell you!' As a rule Struwe was more inclined to make fun of people who only came up to his shoulder.

Nadler soon agreed with his friend. The assembled crowd looked even greater than it was in contrast to the dwarf on the platform. His voice seemed to be all the more powerfully menacing because it issued from a weak and sickly body. Nadler had come to the meeting in a somewhat suspicious mood. The Stahlheim men and their speakers at home often talked disparagingly of this man Goebbels. They liked to rant against the Nazis' knavish tricks and their immaturity. Nadler listened in stunned amazement to the little man on the platform. That man was calling him, Nadler, the backbone of the nation, the source from which healthy blood must flow into the nation's sickly body. He, the speaker, had been given the small end of the stick when it came to size and strength but this merely served to emphasize the strength and size of his listeners. 'Men like you are the best soldiers in wartime. You are the army. You know what you are defending. The earth is not an empty phrase to you. You have sweated your blood into it.'

This man knew everything Nadler knew but could not express. He did not even forget to mention the cattle-dealer, just as if he had been there, describing the Jewish merchant who creeps stealthily into the village. Nadler groaned. Hearing this description he could feel again how he had first been terrorized and then sucked dry.

As he let his eye wander about the room, he suddenly spied Freiherr von Ziesen in the balcony behind a column. Ziesen was listening intently, and the expression he wore made a deep impression on Nadler because this was a face he knew how to read. He felt that Ziesen was both alarmed and attracted as he himself was, and that he was thinking seriously about the speaker of whom, till now, he had spoken with the greatest sarcasm. To find Ziesen in this place with an expression like that on his face impressed Nadler almost as much as the speaker did. Nadler was like the giant in the fairy-tale who always has to serve the strongest master and, consequently, changes from a strong master to one still stronger. Unconsciously his attachment for Ziesen lessened.

II

Every time Klemm and Castrizius took a motor trip together, there was the same preliminary skirmish which, as Becker earnestly hoped, generally resulted in his favour. From the first, the daughter, Nora Castrizius, insisted upon travelling in her own car; she was childishly, almost ridiculously devoted to her own chauffeur. Perhaps there was not even a serious reason and it was simply one

of those whims of this spoiled little creature who always wanted her own way. Becker did not hold it against her: he was sure that sooner or later he would make her like him. All he needed was to drive her round a few times alone with Herr von Klemm. This she had so far avoided, having always used her own chauffeur for such trips. He was a serious, silent man, as much alone in the world as Becker. Even in Castrizius's kitchen, in which Becker little by little began to feel as much at home as in his own, one could not get close to the man. Both Klemm and Castrizius were of one mind in wanting the daughter to join them on their trips, but Klemm preferred to drive with Becker. Castrizius would rather have yielded to his daughter's wishes. As a result there was always a good-natured wrangle which had so far ended in Becker's favour.

During the summer Castrizius drove alone with his own chauffeur, but without his daughter, to a number of important meetings. Later, Becker, together with his master, heard details about Castrizius's impressions and the results of the meeting with which he was well satisfied. Klemm had not accompanied him to Düsseldorf, where Hitler had developed his plans in the presence of the gentlemen of the Rhine and the Ruhr. Now and then they ran over to Godesberg, because Klemm had promised Castrizius – not unwillingly – to look after his daughter during his absence. To Becker's regret, he had not looked after her in the car. On this point the young girl was adamant; how far she was in other respects Becker could not tell. He was always sent straight to the kitchen to eat, while Klemm dined with his young hostess. On the way home Klemm was much quieter than usual; his servants later reported that the *Gnädige Frau* had her own troubles with the master. He was now sleeping alone in his study and came home only for an hour to talk and play with the boy. Helmut went to school in Mainz, to the Realgymnasium to where the older Klemm had sent his son. His father and Becker sometimes dropped him on their way to Hoechst at the Kasteller Bridge. Becker noticed that his master would look after the boy with a sad, thoughtful expression on his face. The boy was strong and merry. Becker knew why his master was worried.

Since Castrizius had returned from Düsseldorf, the trips with father and daughter had been resumed, each time after the same battle of words. Once, while driving, Castrizius said:

'It is not enough always to do the right thing in life. You must do the right thing at the right moment: otherwise the right may turn into the wrong. I've been telling you for a long time that the old parties are, in my opinion, done for. Their slogans won't do the

trick; they won't get you anywhere. We have managed to pull our business partly out of the red; we've divided our ballast so that we are afloat again; but we need wind in the sails, Klemm. A fine prospect isn't it that the sons of your little Helmut will be the ones to pay the cost of the debts their grandfathers made because they lost the war?

'I did not lose it,' Klemm said.

'I know. Offhand I call a thing lost that carries debts in its train. The country at home gave up: the soldiers laid down their arms: Kaiser Wilhelm fled. That musn't happen to us again. We've managed to squeeze out of it fairly well, but that doesn't help. I'm going to invest in Luxembourg now. How can I get the money if we have strikes interfering like last year? In the long run discharges and lock-outs aren't the answer. If we go in for that, it will be as bad as the war. The people at home will give up and the men will lay down their arms.'

'Herr Castrizius said something like that once before,' thought Becker. 'I remember it very well. It was on the way from Berlin to the Rhine.' To Becker all conversations, all conferences, were so many milestones of motor trips.

'The labourer reacts only to Socialism now,' Castrizius went on. 'He does not react to capital. Tomorrow I have to dismiss sixty men again. I have to lower the wages as quickly as possible. They have no idea, Klemm, how hard I can strike. I have to lay them off to get hold of the money I need to invest in Luxembourg, and as fast as possible. I have always tried to stand well with my workers. We need a common socialism; we have to swallow the pill; that is, we have to swallow the pill according to prescription.' He lowered his voice unconsciously. He had suddenly realized that this strange chauffeur might overhear him, and instinctively he felt that his comments were not suitable for the ears of a stranger. Klemm was fond of his chauffeur, it was true. But somehow, somewhere he was not quite of that group of men before whom one could speak openly. Becker was apparently giving all his attention to his driving. Castrizius went on in a carefully lowered tone, not aware that only now did Becker begin to pick up his ears.

'Who will guarantee that the medicine follows the prescription?' asked Klemm. 'That the masses won't take us at our word?'

'That's where the man in Düsseldorf made an impression on me. He feels what is needed. I say *feels*, not knows. The man is not particularly clever. He has no deep knowledge. He stands up there before us, a group of leading industrialists, just the way he stands

before that bunch in Berlin. If men with our brains tried to talk such stuff, people simply would not listen to us. But he himself believes in his own remedy so strongly that you might almost think he was inspired by the Holy Ghost.'

'Who knows,' said Klemm. 'Perhaps he is.'

Castrizius looked at him out of the corner of his little eyes. Then he gave a great belly-laugh. His full, healthy face broke into tiny wrinkles.

'To hear you say a thing like that is the best proof to me that we have the right man for the right job. A magician who can make the first rows in his audience believe in his tricks has to be a darned good magician; a magician who even considers his own tricks inspired can never fail. This is exactly the right moment to let him mount the platform - just when we're bitterly conscious of the fact that we have had the Versailles Treaty for ten years.'

'I don't know,' said Klemm. 'I can't think that all the people are so enthusiastic about this new kind of socialism. After all, they are spoilt. For more than ten years they have had the other, the false socialism: expropriation and so on. You yourself, Castrizius, did not raise much objection to Locarno and the economic treaties with the Soviet Union at the time.'

Castrizius felt that Klemm was speaking too loud. Becker was sure to overhear them. He had the feeling grown-ups have when someone tells a smutty joke in the presence of a child. He purposely raised his voice, just in case Becker was listening:

'As long as we are weak we have to treat with them. Every oil-tank we get out of it is all to the good of Germany.' Then, lowering his voice: 'Luckily we have an old Party that keeps busy explaining to our workers why this sort of revolution, Bolshevism, works to their own harm. They save us the trouble. They keep constantly pointing out all the difficulties the new Soviet State has to struggle with, so that we really haven't much to fear from Russian Socialism. The workers are now so thoroughly involved in their own quarrels that they'll be glad to get hold of something new to put an end to the old stench. That's why I'm ready at this moment to put some money behind the Nazis, though I need all my ready cash for Luxembourg.'

'I don't know, I don't know,' said Klemm. 'There's too much tomfoolery in it to suit me. This hatred of the Jews . . .'

Castrizius's firm red face again broke into countless wrinkles from which his cheeks stood out like smooth, round boils.

'Now, excuse me. There's my branch manager, for instance, a

man by the name of Sondheimer, an able fellow. But I would rather be forced to let him go than to lose my whole gang of miners. I'd rather have poor Sondheimer smashed up and go to a sanatorium at my expense than have my machines or my house in Godesberg wrecked.'

The car was just drawing up before the very house which meant more to Castrizius than his branch manager's bones.

'Go to the kitchen, Becker,' he said, 'and see they treat you well.'

His daughter ran up the steps in front of her father and his guest. Hastily she ordered a bottle of the wine Klemm was particularly fond of; she had the carnations on the table changed for flowers to match the reds and blues in her dress. All during the trip she had sat silent; but she knew that Klemm had never taken his eyes off her. And during dinner she kept her laughing dark brown eyes constantly on Klemm's almost gloomy face.

That evening Klemm ordered Becker to telephone home that they were detained on business. They got out of the car in front of the garden restaurant. Klemm ordered wine. He invited Becker to have a drink with him. Both their faces promptly flushed red, as is the way with plump fresh-skinned faces after drinking that sort of wine. Secret, almost unadmitted thoughts swarmed through Klemm's mind. Becker sat somewhat withdrawn, rigidly at attention, his chair pulled back from the edge of the table, unobtrusively keeping the proper distance from his master. He knew exactly what Herr von Klemm was thinking. He too preferred the dark-eyed, laughing girl to the thin, silent wife.

'Did they feed you well, Becker?'

'Indeed they did, Herr von Klemm! The young lady will certainly make some man happy one of these days.' He felt almost like a father talking to a beloved son. 'Young as she is, she knows how to run a house. She probably got plenty of practice when she was little, seeing as her mother was an invalid.'

Klemm nodded. He did not speak. It did him good to hear Becker talk about the young girl as if by so doing he was drawing her picture on the table. He ordered a second bottle. They had the garden restaurant to themselves. Klemm sat drinking thoughtfully. His father was right. He saw that now - though the old man had long been in his grave. This was exactly the sort of girl he had always wanted for his son. Now as a man of honour Klemm was bound to his fate, not only to his wife to whom he practically owed his life because she had nursed him back to health in the field hospital, but above all to the child she had borne him. He began to think aloud,

heedlessly, not waiting for an answer. Becker listened respectfully. Klemm's words fell on his heart and lay there quietly. When, after an outburst of despair, Klemm was silent, Becker ventured to remark that the son belonged to the father.

But he could not take the son away from his mother without any grounds, Klemm went on thinking out aloud. No law would permit that. Carefully, courteously, never allowing an improper tone of familiarity to creep into his words, Becker expressed his opinion. The war, he said, had brought about unusual circumstances even in daily life. In a war zone the rules and regulations for a motor car were far different from those for a motor trip along the Rhine in peacetime. Klemm listened in surprise: he was astonished to find that his Becker could reflect so deeply. He would never have thought him capable of it - though he had been with him now for just on fifteen years. He thought regretfully that he had never properly appreciated his former orderly. Becker was not merely philosophizing; he was reading the thoughts of another man because he loved him.

No man, be he soldier or officer, Becker continued, can feel bound for ever to the special laws war has imposed on him. Even friendship and love and marriage were different in war than in peace. Klemm thought back, pursuing his thoughts as far as one could aloud: Yes, in war Lenore's face was like the sun over his bed: a bandage, a hypodermic, even a bedpan, all, so to speak, were seen in a rosy light. If only somewhere in this damned peace there were an island called war and on the island a field hospital.

'The child is more mine than hers. I will never give up my son. In case of a divorce the courts would give the child to her. For the boy I will make any sacrifice.'

With all his heart Becker longed to help, just as a father longs to help a beloved son he sees suffering. The bottle was still half full. Suddenly he felt thirsty, much more so than at first. But this time his master forgot to fill up his glass and he did not dare to help himself. He thought: 'This is the moment to speak.' He began haltingly: 'One ought to be able to find a way so that the child could stay with them.'

Klemm finally filled up his glass. He took a drink himself and then said: 'You can't take him away from his mother.'

'Oh, yes, you can; if she is no longer the right woman to have him, then you have to.'

'But how?' cried Klemm. 'The law gives no handle.'

Becker did not know himself where he found all the wisdom that now came to him in his need to help his master. Wine puts all sorts

of ideas into men's heads they would never think of otherwise; ideas for all occasions. Oh yes, when in a divorce case the wife is the guilty party, then the child stays with his father.

Klemm ordered a third bottle. He poured a glass for himself and for his chauffeur. Then he checked himself, remembering that greed was not a dependable trait for men of his class. He was now sitting exaggeratedly erect at an exaggerated distance from the table.

Klemm said 'Unfortunately she is an angel. No judge could find anything against her.'

Becker gave a start. If now he should tell his master the truth he had always suppressed for decency's sake, he would be pointing the way to his happiness.

Klemm spent the night in a Godesburg hotel. As he sat alone on the side of the bed, he felt a twinge of misgiving. He had let himself go too far with his chauffeur. With his permission Becker had already driven off to Wiesbaden to the Hotel Kaiserhof. Becker still had his little sweetheart there in reserve. He reminded her of the visit of Lieven and Frau von Klemm. He worried her with the threat of an affidavit against a reward for the waste of her time and the unpleasantness.

Klemm had not been much disturbed by Becker's information. He was rather relieved than not. The whole business was disgusting, but it saved time and reproaches. In any case it was now too late for regrets.

III

Once again, just as in the old days, Lenore was living at her aunt's and sleeping in the bed she had had as a girl. On her arrival she had been asked about the boy, but she had replied evasively. The next morning Tante Amalie saw from her reddened eyelids that she had spent the night weeping. She was even paler and more laconic than usual. It was Tante Amalie's principle never to ask questions. She would wait till her niece confided in her of her own accord.

The neighbours wondered about the unexpected visit. Then Malzahn came home from the Casino with an explanation. He talked it over first with his wife - after all, it was difficult to decide what attitude to take. For Fräulein von Wenzlow's sake they had to accept her niece. Klemm, however, came frequently to Berlin these days: he was a friend of friends of theirs, a favourite guest in the Spranger household. However, in this divorce case, the young wife was the guilty party. It would be best, therefore, to ignore the whole

matter. In order not to offend Tante Amalie they welcomed Lenore courteously.

It was not long, however, before Tante Amalie realized that something was seriously wrong. There was plenty of evidence: the odd glances the Malzahns exchanged; her niece's red-rimmed eyes; the letters addressed to Lenore from a legal firm. She had thought at first it was a question of the usual divorce. She had never had a high opinion of Klemm – a man like that was sure to lead his own life. Meantime her nephew's wife came home to have her baby, just as at the time of Lenore's first visit. As the two families spent more and more time together, it was inevitable that Tante Amalie should eventually guess the truth. She was horrified. The girl – so she thought of her niece – had been brought up in her own house. There was not the slightest doubt that she was in the wrong. Her punishment was terrible, it was true – the loss of her little son. Now the only home she had was the home of her childhood. However, as long as Lenore never mentioned the divorce, Tante Amalie thought it best to keep silent.

Lenore lived quietly and unquestioned among her companions who avoided rather than spared her. No one cared to mention the reason for her return. Tante Amalie shrank from referring to subjects that might throw a bad light on her family. The Malzahns were anxious not to hurt the proud old lady.

Lenore felt neither hatred nor anger nor bitterness. She was beyond crying now, but at night her aunt heard her pacing to and fro in her bedroom. She was glad no one questioned her, for talking would not have brought relief. In this room her son had once slept: she had dreamt of bringing him up on the same principles as the men of her own family. Now that the object of her dreams was missing, the whole house, so dear to her once, seemed empty. She had never thought of denying the accusations Klemm hurled at her and she had no idea whether she could defend herself against a court decision. She was deeply grateful to this old lady, her Tante Amalie, for her persistent silence. In all other respects her visit in the Scharnhorststrasse was exactly like the last visit when her son Helmut had been with her. Her sister-in-law gave birth to her second child. As before, she lay there with clenched teeth, not because of the labour pains with which the Bible says a woman should beget children, but from grief and indignation that the second child was also a daughter. Lenore took charge of the new-born baby and the elder daughter who had also come with her mother. But she did everything sadly, nor did she dare to comfort her sister-in-law this time. She even

thought to herself of course a son would be better. Who knows what lies ahead of a girl in this world? It would no more have occurred to her to exchange her own world for another than it would occur to a tree to move to another wood. It just stays where it is and keeps on putting out more and more roots.

Her brother came from his garrison to take his wife and children home. Lenore was deeply immersed in her own troubles, but, once again, she felt a violent and inexplicable discomfort when Ilse Wenzlow welcomed her husband with an expression as if she were asking forgiveness. Through the mists of her grief, Lenore realized vaguely that there were weaknesses in her own background but that she could not escape them.

The Malzahn guests, a little group of officers who met regularly for tea, gradually learned of Frau von Klemm's situation. But they too maintained a discreet silence, knowing that questions would be embarrassing. Lenore Klemm sat silently, sometimes, even gloomily, in the midst of their group, toying with one of the teaspoons of which Frau von Malzahn was so proud. As a guest her brother was besieged with questions about conditions in general. Feelings ran high over the Ulm lawsuit. A group of young officers had founded National Socialist cells and were encouraging discussion among their men. Lenore looked in surprise at her brother's long face. Has he always looked like that? Are those the opinions he has always held?

He talked about the young men who had been arrested as if they were much younger than he. They had allowed themselves to be carried away by new ideas. An officer should have only one idea - the army. The army is the nation; in any circumstances whatever the best and strongest and most reliable asset to the nation is the army. Circumstances were constantly changing - this was the only thing that was new. Had any of those cells crept into his regiment? Not through him or to his knowledge. He would fight them ruthlessly.

Suddenly Stachwitz spoke up: 'They probably understood as you did that it was the same old thing under a new aspect. Only a national army, an army of the people, could be that: not a greatly reduced Reichswehr on a peacetime footing.' And he added cautiously: 'At least I believe that's what the young people think.'

Wenzlow's reply was almost gruff. In war there can be no two opinions. In wartime you cannot found a cell in a battalion because that would mean a division of plans. Orders and obedience - those

are the two courses. For the free man, obeying is as much an act of will as commanding. Wenzlow thought of their many conversations in his rooms. Perhaps Stachwitz himself was seeking a way out of this restless muddled world they lived in. Perhaps he knew more about the new party than he would admit.

Stachwitz withdrew into his silence. He had formed the habit of tossing a few words into the conversation, then keeping quiet just when his listeners expected him to continue. His real reason for coming to Potsdam on his leave was to see Tante Amalie again. Since childhood he had been deeply devoted to her, though he never quite knew why.

Many months later Klemm and his chauffeur sat together in the same garden restaurant. The wedding day was set: the preparations had been made, the unpleasantnesses were all in the past. Lenore had long since gone back home to Potsdam. Since her departure the boy had been living in Godesberg where he would stay till after Klemm was married. Klemm had quarrelled with his fiancée only on one point, and in the end he had given in. She insisted upon bringing her own chauffeur to their new home. Of course Becker would be just as well off with Castrizius, his future father-in-law, who was quite willing to make the exchange. This would save Becker from having to look for a new job and spare Klemm from the obligation of having to pay his expenses had he been forced to dismiss the man.

The moment he was alone Klemm was angry with himself for having given his fiancée his word. But he took comfort in the thought that he could certainly take Becker back into service again as soon as they were married and she had got over her dislike of her husband's chauffeur. 'It's best to get unpleasant things over as quickly as possible,' thought Klemm. He made up his mind to tell Becker before they reached home.

Becker was happy, as always, when his employer invited him to have a glass of wine with him at the same table. He enjoyed the surprised glances of other guests. As usual he sat exaggeratedly straight, keeping a certain distance between the chair and the table edge. When you look at a person for the last time that is really the first and only time you see him clearly. Klemm noticed Becker's modestly intimate manner, as if he were a candidate for the job instead of about to be dismissed. He thought: 'This business about Becker is a mess. Why on earth did my little girl get such nonsense into her head? It's not easy to find a man like him again. Incredibly

dependable, and yet not a shade too familiar.' He pulled himself together.

'My dear Becker,' he said, 'when one thinks what we two have been through together!'

'That's right, sir,' said Becker.

'It's not going to be easy to tell you what I have to now. Believe me, I shall never forget what you have done for me.'

Becker thought: 'What's he getting at?'

He took a drink - Klemm had just taken one too. To Becker's delight the same street-cleaners who had been so surprised to see his employer invite him to drink with him were sitting again at the next table.

'It's impossible to speak, in a few words, of all you have done for me, Becker, and I'm not the man to forget things like that. You always knew where to come if you were worried or in trouble.'

Funny, thought Becker. What's biting him today? Aloud he said: 'Yes, sir.' Then he quickly emptied his glass because Klemm had emptied his. Klemm poured out more for them both.

'By the way, Becker, the point is - we have to separate. My fiancée insists upon bringing her own chauffeur with her. There's nothing you and I can do about it, Becker. At least not just yet. You can be quite sure I shall do my best to get you back again in, let us say, a year at the most. And in the meantime I shall see that you are well taken care of. My father-in-law will engage you at once. Better pay than with us, and, I think, not so much work.'

Becker stared his employer straight in the eye. Klemm went on:

'I remember you once praised the Castrizius household to me. It'll be a regular rest cure for you.'

Becker interrupted in a hoarse voice: 'Don't worry about me, sir.'

'But how could I help it, my dear Becker? All this time we've been one flesh and blood. Young women don't understand a thing like that. I suspect it's also some sort of a fancy, an *idée fixe* of Nora's. She'll soon get over it. By next year I'm sure you'll be driving us both straight: across Europe on our summer vacation.'

He emptied his glass at one gulp. Becker emptied his too. The chauffeur sat stiffly erect, as stiff as a poker. Never before in his life had anything hit him so hard, so unaccountably, so irretrievably: not even a bullet in his flesh or grief in his heart. Because his mind could not grasp the whole terrible news at once, it clutched at a side issue. Sure, he thought, I was the one who helped her to marry the man. I helped arrange the divorce and now she's got me sacked. She's probably afraid I'll spy on her.

Klemm cried: 'Let's go, Becker. I have to stop in Mainz for a second and leave my card at Fräulein Klass's. Then we'll drive home over the Kasteller Bridge.'

More working men had come in and now sat drinking in groups, their tables drawn together. Two or three looked up sharply at Klemm and Becker as they passed. Then they put their heads together and whispered. They probably knew better than the French police just whom Klemm helped with his money, whom he received in his house. Becker had always been amused when they criticized Klemm for drinking at the same table in their restaurant with his chauffeur. 'That's something their wooden heads can't understand,' he used to think. 'They can't realize that we share the same Fatherland, the same war and the same memories.' Now, as he passed the men, he thought: 'Does Klemm really think he can hand me over like a body-slave to Castrizius?'

By the time he had reached the car, got in and let out the clutch, the surge of vague emotions, bitterness and disappointment had abated. His thoughts began to clear: 'I've done everything for the man. Many a time I've saved his life. What I did for him at the last when I saw how much he wanted a divorce and couldn't find a way out himself was really not decent, but I've loved the man as if he were my own son. I did it because I wanted to help him. I suppose he's thinking now - with a fellow who'll do a thing like that, I don't have to be so particular.'

They drove along the right bank of the Rhine towards the city, past Budenheim and Mombach. Klemm leaned forward.

'You really don't know how it hurts me that we two have to part,' he said. 'Think over my proposition: I'll bring my girl round before the year is up. That's why it's better for you to stay nearby. We're used to talking frankly with each other.'

Becker saw Klemm's face in the mirror. It was good-natured and still young. The chauffeur had been accustomed so long to that face with the thick, red-gold pointed beard, the merry eyes and slightly bulbous nose - the beloved features of the man he loved best - that now it hurt him to look at them. Klemm went on:

'It will be a sort of holiday for you. It's all nonsense, this parting. I tell you it's just a woman's whim. Women don't understand what two men can mean to each other. In the Ardennes, do you remember, how we had to crawl around a pile of dead, you and I, and we kept loading and shooting and the enemy thought there were twenty of us, not just two. Remember, Becker? Remember how you carried me at night through the enemy lines!'

Becker said hoarsely: 'We didn't even know the French had occupied the village.'

'And then in the Balkans, Becker, how we got hold of the car. And I swore my orderly had formerly been a chauffeur so that I could keep you.'

Becker said dejectedly, as if every sound choked him:

'I learned to drive in two weeks.'

'It wouldn't have been your fault, Becker, if we'd both of us broken our bones. But we came safely from Constantinople to Sofia; and from Sofia to Budapest and to Vienna.'

Becker thought: 'I ought to have wrecked the car that time and him and me with it. They couldn't have blamed me then.'

'Remember the fellow we took into the car at the Hungarian border and drove in the opposite direction and he never noticed it! He thought we would soon reach the Czech side. How white he got when he understood what was up.'

Becker said: 'Yes.' He thought: 'Whatever this man told me to do was as sacred to me as the Ten Commandments.'

At the Mainz customs bridge they had to wait till two men swung the drawbridge back into place to allow cars and pedestrians to pass. Klemm went on:

'And in Berlin, how we got there just in time to scare the liver and lights out of the Reds. Remember the night we cleaned out the Marstall! You, Becker, drove me from post to post. One bullet hit the bumper, one the cushions at the back. And then, on the way back to Nowawes, how we met the car with the prisoner from the Volksmarine Division. And to simplify matters we put an end to him right then and there.'

Becker said gloomily: 'No, I wasn't there.'

'Why yes, of course you were,' Klemm insisted. 'Have you forgotten? We had a flat tyre. We had to change over into the prisoner's car. Then we all got out for a second to finish the man off. That damned Lieven was with us too.'

Becker said: 'Yes, he was there. Not me.'

'And Wenzlow, my former brother-in-law.'

'Him too,' said Becker sticking stubbornly to his story like a man who is drunk or in despair. 'And there was another soldier too. There were five of us at first. But you all got out: I stayed behind in the car. You shot the man. But I wasn't there - the other three were. I only helped bury him.'

'All right, then you just helped bury him. Here! I'll make a quick call now at Taunusstrasse 11. It's to be hoped the old lady isn't at home.'

They drove into the city. Becker waited in front of the house. He was about to light a cigarette, then he thought: 'What's the use of a cigarette now?' He had lost all desire even for that. Klemm came back from the house, beaming: 'Thank God, she isn't at home.' Becker jumped out to open the car door as usual. As he put his hand on the knob, he felt a surge of wild resentment. He turned and got into the front seat so quickly that Klemm could not see his face. This time Klemm's own face, as he walked towards the car, had failed to stir Becker. This last blow had wiped out all his old devotion. His employer's familiar features now roused only a feeling of hate. To open the door for him seemed to Becker a humiliation. Klemm said: 'Step on it. In ten minutes we can be home!'

Becker thought: 'Step on it! That's it! That would just suit your book. You'd better cut out that tone, mister.' He felt a wild desire to revenge himself as quickly and thoroughly as he had been hurt. But automatically his hands obeyed and he shifted the clutch. He took the next curve sharply. They drove down the street to the Mainz bridgehead opposite the Kasteller Bridge. Becker was now driving at a speed forbidden on the bridge.

'Careful!' warned Klemm. 'There's the French sentry.'

Becker suddenly stepped on the gas and shot ahead. Klemm laid his hand on Becker's forearm. A few yards ahead of the French sentry stood a native policeman. He raised his hand to halt the car. When it dashed by like a maddened devil, he whistled to the policeman on the Kasteller Bridge. Becker felt Klemm's hand pressing on his arm to check him. This pressure released the last control within him and he promptly swerved the steering wheel. At top speed the car, describing a sharp curve, crashed through the parapet and plunged into the Rhine.

As she pared potatoes in the kitchen, Tante Amalie looked through the window at her nephew and niece sitting in the rusty swing, their favourite place of old. She could not hear their words, but she was relieved to see her niece talking volubly to her brother. The child was right, he was the only person to whom she could speak frankly. These last days she had even stopped crying at night: she had turned to stone. Tante Amalie felt a gentle respect for her.

'Where did Lieven and Klemm run into each other?' asked Wenzlow, who had heard the whole story from his parents-in-law. 'Did they fight?'

'Of course not!' said Lenore. 'Lieven as good as disappeared long ago. I myself haven't the slightest idea where he is now. I was once

in love with the man for a few hours. All right - that happens to you men, too. I don't want to see him again. Klemm made no effort to look for him. He has no intention of getting himself shot: he wants to marry again.'

'You made an awful mess of things, sister,' said Wenzlow. 'Why did you admit the whole story the moment your husband accused you?'

'I didn't know what else to do. I thought, too, it meant at the most a divorce. I did not realize he would take the child from me.' And she added: 'It was all the fault of that Becker, the chauffeur. I never could stand him. He would do anything for Klemm. I think he would even commit murder if Klemm asked him to.'

Wenzlow said: 'They're two of a kind.'

The news of the tragic accident came a few days later. Lenore received a notice from Klemm's lawyer to go at once to Bad Nauheim and fetch her son. She was now the boy's guardian, though the court gave the chief responsibility to the dead man's cousin, the same Klemm who had run the business during the older man's absence in the war and was now carrying it on alone. Lenore knew him only slightly. The dead man had been in the habit of ridiculing him. Cousin Klemm had always felt pushed aside - which was the way Fate had treated him so far. He was pedantic and humourless and always fussing about details. As he had sons himself, Lenore expected little interference from him.

The Castrizius governess brought the boy to Nauheim. He had spent several months in the house of the man who was to have been his grandfather-in-law. The old governess, who had had charge of Helmut, wept because she had to hand over the boy to his unworthy mother. The little fellow felt so much at home in the Castrizius household that he too cried when he said good-bye. This was another bitter blow for Lenore. She was not gay and cheerful enough by temperament to comfort the boy quickly. Thin, repressed Tante Amalie and her austere house were poor substitutes for the entertaining surroundings he had lost.

IV

Lieven seldom went out to see people in his former circles, for to him every change of surroundings was as much of an upheaval as going to another country. Even had Klemm really tried to find him, Lieven would not have heard of the divorce in the Klemm household for some time. However, Klemm lacked the necessary witness's

testimony, and as he had attained his object there was no special reason to try to find Lieven. For the time being Lieven lived in his shabby garden-house room; his friend Luettgens slept on his sofa more frequently than he liked, for Luettgens had been out of a job for some time. The physical culture course had not lasted. The more he suffered under conditions he found depressing, the bolder and more fantastic became his nightly monologues about an imaginary future. The hungrier and the more worried he lay down on the sofa, the more power he promised himself from this future.

Lieven's entrance into the N.S.D.A.P. was effected under the conditions he had proposed. He was released from what he called profession of faith. He detested demonstrations, cell meetings, proselytizing among the employees of his electric display company. The top Nazis even thought it might be useful if he continued to let himself be known to his old friends as an officer out of a job. Where conferences between representatives of the Nazi Party and military groups were concerned, Lieven played an important role as the man who, though he would not accept the Nazis *in toto* thought it might be possible to work with them. By this means he always succeeded in bringing the groups together.

As good – or bad – fortune seldom comes 'not in single spies but in battalions', Lieven now enjoyed a considerable amount of luck during the year. First he met a certain Hauptmann Steffen. Steffen attended the general session as a member of the Stahlheim. The last time Lieven had seen Steffen was at Herr Castrizius's reception at the Hotel Adlon. Steffen remembered that Lieven had been among the special guests at a very select party. He was impressed and decided that this Lieven was worth knowing. The man looked, however, as though he had come down in the world and this gave Steffen the idea of putting him on his feet. They had a few drinks together and Steffen promised to arrange a meeting with Banker Heims. Heims was in urgent need of representatives for his now-flourishing business in the East. He wanted keen, wide-awake men who could speak several languages.

'I believe you'd be just the right man for my Herr Heims, Lieven. I think he knows your name. You have estates out there in Lithuania.'

'Had. We were dispossessed.' To be exact, his cousin had been dispossessed. He himself had never had any more estates than he has today although the names were the same.

'Well, but don't let Heims know that you lean towards the Nazis. He can't stand the word Socialist. Oh, don't be surprised! I've

already noticed you had a leaning towards them. I'm holding my own decision in reserve.'

Lieven thought: 'It turns out that a great many people have these secret leanings.'

'Perhaps,' said Steffen, 'there are more camouflaged Nazis running about than one thinks.' They both laughed. 'Perhaps even Bruening is one of them.'

'No, no, not he. He's running about a church with a candle in his hand for fear his conscience and his confessor might grant an emergency decree.'

A few days later Lieven handed in his resignation to the electric display company. From now on he turned in to his superior officer, a certain Rabner, a duplicate report of the most important correspondence and transactions in his new job.

True, he still could not afford to dine at his favourite restaurant, but at least with his better pay he was not forced to choose between spending the evenings alone in his room or at a bar. He usually sat in a café on the Kurfürstendamm where he could get away for a few hours from Luettgens's endless expositions. He scoffed at the lavish display of bad music, yellow silk, silver-coloured plates and dim lights which gave the guests a sense of spurious luxury, he derived the same satisfaction from them as they did. He enjoyed watching the new arrivals. The couples - the women looking as if they had stepped out of the latest film, the men, fully aware of their masculine charm - stood in the doorway as they came in and looked round to give the guests a chance to admire them. A young woman, very thin, came in walking as if she were plodding across a marsh. Her slender silk-covered legs and high heels made her appear taller than she was. She wore a fox fur around her neck. Lieven thought the stuffed fox face on the fur was more attractive than her own. Her hair was cut so short that one could see her earrings. To his dismay the girl on stilts came towards his table. She shoved one leg forward and swung her hip.

'Hello there, Lieven,' she said, and laughed. 'You haven't changed a bit.'

'With whom have I the honour?' said Lieven.

Her toneless laughter was harsh. It rang like the last drop out of a long-emptied vessel. Slowly, magically her plaits lengthened from her head to her hips. Her little face behind the heavy layer of powder looked white and desperate; a few drops from her mascaraed eyes trickled down like thick tears.

'You'll buy me a drink for old time's sake, won't you, Lieven?'

She sat down eagerly and moved close to him. Then, as her hand lay beside his, she flipped his fingers one after the other.

'You've changed a lot,' he said.

She answered shrewdly: 'Nothing changes people so much as time.'

She let go of his fingers and began to drum on the table in time with the music. Lieven noticed that her hands were not quite clean.

'I saw your father as I was leaving Gleim's place,' he said. 'He thought you were still with the family you were working for.'

'Oh yes, my father. Of course I couldn't have any callers there - so there was nothing to do but get out and stand on my own feet.'

'Don't you ever want to go back?'

'No,' she said firmly. 'Not after everything I've been through. You must know I was in love with you. I don't believe you have any idea how much.' She spoke with absolute sincerity. But she made the words 'I' and 'you' sound like personal names so that it was clear that by 'I' she meant herself and 'you' was the man beside her.

'I tried my best to get you back. And when I couldn't, nothing mattered any more. Now it all makes so little difference to me I can't believe I ever thought it important.'

She did not remember the sequence of events any better than her father the time he had wept in the station restaurant when Lieven was leaving. She went on gaily:

'Well, how're things going with you? You know I'm really glad to see you again after such a long time. We might make a date for tomorrow afternoon if you like.'

'I'm sorry,' Lieven said. 'I have to leave Berlin early tomorrow.'

He ordered his meal and paid for it. Then he went straight to Steglitz; it was the first time he was glad to get home. And for the first time he was the one who wanted to do the talking tonight instead of listening to Luettgens as he fell asleep. Luettgens listened quietly, controlling his own desire to talk, till Lieven described the conditions under which he had met the girl.

'See here, Lieven, you've got a Slavonic infection in your blood - self-condemnation. In Russian novels you're always meeting people who get a great kick out of remorse. If the girl had really been the decent sort you thought she was, she wouldn't have gone to the bad so completely. She wouldn't have gone to pieces just because of an unfortunate love affair. A girl like that always goes to the bad somehow or other. There's always something constitutionally wrong with her.'

Up to now Lieven had been the one to encourage Luettgens: tonight he gladly let little Luettgens advise and encourage him.

After two temporary jobs and six months of unemployment, Geschke was happy to get his old job back again. Not only had his friend, Kahle, kept his word and interceded for him, but three or four others had helped to bring about this miracle. True, this job was not his old place in his own quarter. He now had to travel three-quarters of an hour further to the garages. In the same eight-hour day he had to make many more trips than before and to do all the unloading for which he used to have a helper. He noticed, too, that after he had deducted money for his car fare and the wear and tear of his clothes, there was not much difference between his pay and the unemployment insurance and he was unable to have as many necessities as he had hoped. But he now had enough meat on Sundays for the whole family – though not every day in the week. Hans would have to wait a while for the long trousers he had promised him. Marie said she could save the money in three months if he kept his job as long. He felt that he really ought to celebrate this piece of surprising and unexpected good luck. Long ago he had promised his wife to show her the cherry blossoms in bloom. But it had always been impossible, for some reason or other, to arrange the outing with the three children. While he was out of work they had contented themselves with looking forward to it next spring.

The girl helped her stepmother prepare a large package with sandwiches. They also put in a bag of ground coffee. At night she also helped her sew up the dress that lay still unfinished in the bureau drawer. The boys would rather have stayed at home. The older boy had counted to the last on his teacher, Degreif, who often took him on long walks and outings, even though he was not at school any more. But Degreif had gone off for the week-end with a couple of boys. Franz was angry because his teacher had forgotten him this time. Franz was now learning the carpenter's trade. What came of it would be at the best a chance of work: if he did not find any he would go on the dole. But the boy wanted more than that. Like all men, he felt born for better things. He was not, however, fully aware of his own fear, the fear shared by all men alike – the fear of emptiness, a life unlivd. He sensed, however, that the group of neighbours' children, or of his father's friends, who sometimes took him with them, did not feel this need. Compared to his hopes and fears, their singing and their long walks were childish nonsense, like their rowing and swimming. Even at school his

teacher Degreif had demanded much more of a German boy: He had demanded daring exertions that expressed his feelings of being born to greater things. If Degreif had asked Franz to go to the moon with him, he would have obeyed without a moment's hesitation.

With his unruly hair neatly brushed, Hans sat squeezed in between his mother and his sister in the local train. He hated it. But no matter how crowded and how hot it was, the moment the country on the other side of the train window turned green the people in the compartment cheered up and began to talk. Marie was homesick the moment she saw the broad expanse of sky. It was years and years since she had had an opportunity to go back to her old home. Now the thought came to her – why not go? A foolish thought! Geschke was uncomfortably hot and sweaty. He thought to himself: Sundays at home are really best of all. But he had got it into his head that this trip was something they ought to do.

By the time they left the train everyone was exhausted. The crowd of travellers separated, perspiring and laughing and scolding on their way to various inns. They admired the fruit trees in bloom, in the orchards, for this was blossom-time. Helene, with her wide open eyes and big nostrils, ran a little ahead of them. She had never known that the earth could smell so good; she had never seen the white and pink foam on the trees. She had always loved to look at the hedges in bloom at the lumber yard. Her brothers lazily stripped the bushes. Geschke pushed open a garden gate he knew of old. He settled his family at one of the tables under the blossoming trees. Now at last he felt proud of his undertaking, of the free table at which he had planted his family. He was proud, too, of the pot with steaming water and of the strainer with which Marie now brewed the coffee exactly as she did at home in her kitchen. Happening to glance at his little girl's face, he saw that his outing was a success. Helene was speechless with joy over the feast which reached its apex when a cherry blossom fell on the table, as if to prove to the child that she really was eating under the open sky.

Geschke said suddenly: 'How our Paul would have enjoyed this!' Paul – the son who had died. Marie nodded sadly. She had never got over the boy's death. But she was glad Geschke had said 'our Paul'. Gently she scolded the two boys who kept sipping the light beer their father had ordered. She divided the rolls equally among them. Then she leaned her head on her hands and gazed vacantly at the people laughing and shouting all round them.

'What's the matter with you?' asked Geschke. She said quickly:

'Nothing.' Luckily he went into the tavern after that and Marie stared obliquely towards the second table in front of them. There among a group of people sat a short, thin little man. When he laughed, he laughed all over his face and showed his big white teeth. Just the way he had laughed that time at the 'Anchor', and he snapped his fingers just the same way when he thought of a clever retort.

Marie understood now why they had put off the outing from one Sunday to another. Why had they happened to have the money for it just today? Why had Geschke brought her to this particular tavern garden? Somewhere in the desert of perspiring faces the one face that mattered was hidden. She herself had not known how sharply she had noticed everything, not only about her lover, Erwin, but about everything connected with him. She nudged her little boy Hans under the table. She had always refrained from singling out her own son among the children. Now she had no choice. The little boy looked up at her. His mother's calm pale face had suddenly changed. To Hans that was as strange as if the sky or the earth had burst open. Realizing that she wanted to say something to him, he edged close to her. She put her arm around him and pretended to look for a speck of dust in his eye. He stood quite still. He knew she did not want his brother and sister to hear what she said.

'A little to one side straight in front of us,' said his mother, 'a man is sitting. He is laughing and showing his teeth. Don't let him out of your sight; you must find out where he lives. You mustn't tell anyone about this: it is just between you and me.'

Then she said aloud so that everyone could hear - Geschke had just returned to the table: 'Hans has to go home. I promised Tante Emilie the finished buttonholes before evening.'

Geschke grumbled. The boy hurried off before his father could stop him. The man his mother had pointed out flung back his head again and laughed. Then he walked out of the garden with two other men. At his table Geschke went on growling and scolding because the Sunday had been spoiled. Marie quietly urged him to have another glass of light beer.

Hans found a seat in the same compartment with the stranger who was still laughing and talking with his companions. They all got out at the Potsdamer Station. The boy hung back a little; then he leapt on the bus after them. They got off at the Buelowstrasse. He followed them into the house through the courtyard. He waited, undecided what to do, till he heard them open a door on the third

floor. Then he moved off. But he hung around the Buelow Canal a while longer – he seldom came there. He wondered who the man was. He was happy to share a secret with his mother, just they two and no one else.

When he came into the kitchen at home his parents were already at table. Tante Emilie, gaily dressed and smelling of perfume, sat between them. His father immediately began to scold and asked him why, instead of obeying his mother, he had been hiding in the city. His mother looked at him sharply: he felt again that tingle of pleasure at the secret they shared.

That night after the family was in bed his mother came to him. Her calm face looked extraordinarily beautiful. He told her the name of the street.

'Who was that?' he asked. Marie thought a moment. Then it occurred to her what she could say. 'Someone I knew long ago: he was at the front with my brothers.'

The next day, instead of going to school, Hans went to the house on the Buelowstrasse. He climbed the stairs to the third floor. A fat woman opened the door and sent him angrily away. No stranger lived here. Hans did not trust the woman: he did not believe her. However, not wanting to go home with the job unfinished, he hung about in the archway. He was not surprised when, at last, the stranger came out. The man hurried off towards the north of the city. Hans followed him through the maze of subways, in and out, up and down; he followed him through another maze of narrow streets; he waited a long time before a house. Secretly he was afraid the stranger had disappeared for good and all. And he was vexed with himself because he had been too shy to speak to him on the way there.

Then the stranger came out carrying a suitcase and a package. This was Hans's opportunity. He jumped forward and offered to carry the bag. The strange man shot him a swift glance, seemed satisfied with the boy's appearance and gave him the suitcase and the package. Then he hailed a taxi. The boy thought that all this had something to do with his mother, the trip to the station, the way the stranger looked at him, the taxi with cushions. He carried the luggage into the station restaurant. The man promised to give him his money if he would come back to the table and get him in time for the twelve o'clock train.

The boy ran home. The man was at the station, he told Marie. They could speak to him if they went at once. All the morning Marie had waited for news: perhaps the man had only been visiting in the

Buelowstrasse. In this city a man could vanish as completely as in life itself. She followed the boy: he was the one who led her now. Her face was so still that the boy did not dare to question her. The wise neighbours were mistaken: time heals nothing. It is a lie when people say that the things that happen to one in youth are puerile, that life's earnest moments begin later. Life with its worries and trouble and its infinitesimal joys deadens one. Everything that comes after youth, all the seriousness of life, is in reality stupid. Only when one is torn with waiting, when one is first in love but still keeps on waiting purposelessly, does one understand what life really means. If, when she waited that time long ago, the door had opened she would have had something worth being happy about. Not as now when all one had to rejoice over was relief work, or the dole, or a Sunday outing. And when her lover failed to appear, she had been right to despair because something great had been lost for ever.

'There he is,' said Hans.

Marie had already recognized the man. She pushed the boy back. He sat down on a cart in front of the restaurant door. He watched his mother walk shyly up to the strange man.

'Perhaps you do not know me,' she said. 'One Sunday many years ago you came into a restaurant called the "Anchor" with my friend. His name was Erwin. I think you were his friend. I served you both that time. I was the waitress in the "Anchor".' She was speaking more urgently now, for she thought there was a warmer light in the man's eye. 'Erwin and I became friends: we loved each other. He always came when he said he would. Then he stopped coming. All of a sudden he disappeared. Please, please, tell me why. You were certainly his friend.'

The man looked at her and she could see that he was not going to tell her. He frowned and two marks like exclamation points appeared on his forehead.

'I don't know who you're talking about, my good woman,' he said. 'I don't know any Erwin. I've never seen you before.' The warmth in his eyes had already fled.

'I'm positive you are his friend,' said Marie. 'I recognize you. You must tell me what has become of him.'

He shook his head. Now that he was not laughing and showing his teeth, he looked much more like a stranger than yesterday.

'I don't know any Erwin,' he repeated. 'I've never in my life been in a restaurant called the "Anchor". There are hundreds of thousands of men in Berlin who look like me. Perhaps the man that time was my double. It must have happened a good many years ago.'

Marie tried to speak. She moved her lips, then she shrugged her shoulders and turned away. The stranger apparently led such a busy life that he had forgotten meeting her; he had forgotten that Sunday and the man at his side. Perhaps he had not known Erwin very long. Perhaps he had not even noticed where he was that Sunday. For many people life was very full in the big city. What seemed most important to some, was only an incident to others. She herself was no longer sure about him as yesterday.

At the entrance she ran into her little son still sitting on the cart.

'Go to school,' she said. 'It was nothing.' And she added: 'No, don't go back to him again. He was not the man. I was mistaken.'

Instead of going straight home, Marie went first into Tante Emilie's courtyard. Fortunately Emilie was in the workshop. Marie reached for the key under the doormat. She stood in front of the mirror over the chest of drawers. Was it possible the man really had not recognized her? It was all so fresh in her heart: in Tante Emilie's mirror, so faded. The glass reflected her tired face, the outlines round her cheekbones, her mouth, her blurred temples. She sat down on the arm of the sofa, weary and dejected. She did not cry: her eyes were dry. Her face looked drawn, older. She put the key back in its place under the doormat and hurried home.

The boy should have gone back to school long before this. When he saw his mother come in, he felt a sharp pain in his heart - he could not have said why. Her face suddenly looked as bleak and cold as it had looked bright and happy yesterday. He had hoped to earn enough from carrying the bags to buy a knife, a fine knife with a mother-of-pearl handle which he had picked out long ago. He never dreamt that he could really own it. To be sure his mother had told him not to go back to the stranger. She had made a mistake. But he could not see that that was any reason for giving up his knife. No one need ever know.

He ran back to the table. The man looked up.

'Oh, it's you!' he said. 'Good! Come along with me to the train.' On the platform he added: 'If you want to earn the same amount again then be at this gate tomorrow night.'

The man got into a third-class compartment. There was just room enough to put his package and his small bag on the seat beside him. The other passengers were a couple of elderly peasant women, with a child, and a little man with a brief-case. To avoid conversation he drew back in his corner and closed his eyes.

Marie had not made a mistake. He was the man she had recog-

nized. But she was wrong if she thought him the sort of person for whom a meeting means nothing more than a casual Sunday outing. He did not trust that sort of person: he had always been suspicious of people who considered themselves set apart and therefore superior to the general run of mankind. He, Martin, had always thought that in this point such men were like those callous persons whose lives were filled with so many different things that individual loves and friendships and meetings are no more than a few colourful strokes of the brush on the painting as a whole. Ever since he could remember he had always felt, however, that every man or woman he met on his way through life was worthy of his full attention. In his memory of them, at least, each individual should stand out from the crowd, with all his own particular desires and attributes.

He had not remembered the woman immediately – the light had gone out of her faded face, all except the narrow strip above her forehead. But his memory of the day she referred to was still crystal-clear: nothing could ever dim the brightness of that brief friendship. No matter how many friendships he made in later life, the radiance of those days had never touched them. Those stars had dimmed for ever. Of that he was certain. Now, in his corner of the compartment, he remembered the girl and that she had been a waitress in the 'Anchor'. She had known him at once, though he had thought no one could recognize him. She knew the little details about him that no passport photograph ever betrays, details she could not forget, but which certainly did not appear on the papers with which he was leaving his homeland. He counted up: this was the third order for arrest since he had left Berlin that time so long ago.

The peasant woman hushed her child – though the little one had kept very quiet. As if he felt obliged to apologize to his dead friend, Martin thought: 'I didn't dare to admit who I was – there is too much at stake for that. You understand: It's just as it was in those days: the same spying, the same orders for arrest, the same false papers. And the same struggle and the same hope. Particularly at this very moment – all exactly as before.'

Martin had come back from the front with his friend, Erwin. The two young men had expected that the government would be overthrown. They had fought together and faced death together. Their own deaths had seemed of no significance, as if the Day of Judgment that was about to come upon the world would rouse all the dead anyway. Erwin had been arrested after the attack on the Marstall. Later, in the Grünewald, some working men had found a

dead man – it must have been Erwin. Martin, however, had been able to escape.

He blinked his eyes and stared out of the window at the rows of suburban houses scattered over the flat countryside. They passed lakes and woods. The tracks wound around each other through the green and yellow plain. The little man was reading his newspaper which he held propped up over his brief-case; the farmer's wife kept warning her child not to stare at the stranger.

Martin could see the dead man now as plain as in life. In those days there had been neither time nor any reason to look at him squarely. But now, compared to the dead man, the farmer's wife and the man with the brief-case seemed like ghosts.

'Guess whom I met at the station! the girl from the "Anchor". Perhaps you were having a love affair with her; you never told me anything about it. You ought to have told me everything – that is only right among friends. You were my best friend. I have never had such a friend since.'

The dead man's face remained as calm as ever, as little disturbed by this information as by the rattling of the train. That was the way Erwin had always been: neither gay nor sad, but calm. He, Martin, was given to cursing and shouting and sometimes to laughing uproariously. Nothing had ever stirred the calm of that other face, nor was it stirred now.

'I could not tell her anything,' Martin went on in his thoughts. 'She may have been counting on hearing what I could tell her – that worries me. I'm on my way to Brandenburg now. The district leaders from various provinces are meeting there.' Martin continued to speak excitedly to that dead face, colder now and more dauntless than ever. 'Our party has grown tremendously and is stronger than ever. Nevertheless we have not been able to make any more headway than in your day. The split at that time between us and the workers who refused to give up their old party and their leaders and their passwords for ours, is even greater than before. There is not a city, not a street, not a house, not a room where someone does not hate someone else. One man quarrels with another: brothers fight brothers.'

He tried desperately to keep the beloved features before him. They seemed to have only one message for him: 'Whatever may happen, I am dead.'

'All the people we listened to in those days are dead – Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Jogisches, all dead. And we, the new Party they valued more than their lives, and the old Party which hated us then – we

are still hating each other, still quarrelling among ourselves even more violently than before. Just as all of us together will be hated by those who hate everything Red or even faintly tinged with Red. They set their White Guards on us; they became so bold and greedy that they thought: Now that you are all dead, our hour has come. There is no one left to put up a real fight. The big fires have burnt themselves out: the big voices are silenced; the Reich is falling into our laps.'

The dead man's face began to fade from Martin's memory: first the features became sharper, then they faded into the dark.

'Kapp marched to Berlin with Ehrhardt and the White Guards crowd. Then we suddenly stopped our quarrelling for one whole day. Disunited as we were, we threw Kapp and his men out. Every working man hated that bunch so violently that this hatred accomplished more than any other emotion. But when it was all over, they began fighting among themselves again. Ebert called out the same crowd he had fled from, to help him against us and silence us.'

The farmer's wife said: 'Stop staring at the gentleman like that.'

'It doesn't bother me,' said Martin and patted the child's hair which was parted as carefully in the middle as if with a ruler. Her little pigtailed were plaited so tightly that they stood out from her head like twigs.

'We went on fighting on the Ruhr, in Central Germany, in Thuringia and in Saxony. We still thought we could make a Soviet state out of Germany and out of all Europe a union of Soviet states. The Soviet Union was there, behind us: it grew stronger and larger. With every step we took, every job, every bullet and every arrest, I knew that this was something different from anything that had happened before. Up to now men have fought for an ideal in their hearts: now they were fighting for the first time for an ideal that actually exists in the world. You were dead, but it was there.'

The child stared at Martin as if a strange face was a wilderness. Again the farmer's wife said: 'You mustn't stare like that.' Behind the child's round face, Erwin's faded away. Martin could barely see his features, though he tried desperately to hold them. 'That is why we shall be hated and persecuted. Men hate and persecute so violently only something that is actually present, something they would prevent others from seeing. We can do the same thing. Those who try to stop us are constantly making a tremendous effort to prove that "it is not at all what you thought. It doesn't pay to fight for it".'

In his turbulent way he had once tried to convince his dead

friend. The calmer his friend, the more violent Martin became. He had seized him by the buttonhole: he could feel the button in his hand as if it had come off this very minute. He even thought: 'Perhaps that girl from the "Anchor" had to sew the button on for him afterwards.' The button was all he could recall now: the face had vanished.

'You see what is left: the great are even greater; the bad even worse. And so many disappointments, so much blood, so many hopes fulfilled and so many shattered. You can recognize all of us and yet you have missed everything. You missed the Red Army's march on Warsaw and our disappointment when it retreated. You did not live to see Lenin's death, you have never heard the name Stalin. So many, many names you have missed: Pilsudski in Poland, Mussolini in Italy. And you, still dead. Of course you know Hindenburg whom we elected after Ebert. That is the lesson our nation learnt from the war: that is the result of all our sufferings and all our wounds. They chose the Field-Marshal. Zoergiebel shot at us on the very same streets where they shot at us before. He forbade us to carry the Red flag on the First of May, and the unemployed, who could not buy a shirt for their backs, are glad to get the brown shirts free of charge in which to hide their worn, starved bones. For the sake of them they sing the songs you know, but set to new, impudent, vulgar verses. The Red flag we are forbidden to carry, they now carry with a white cross and a swastika in the middle.'

The train pulled into Brandenburg. The little man sat still in his seat and cast suspicious glances at Martin to see whether he was looking at the brief-case. The farmer's wife scolded her child because she had pushed ahead. Martin shrugged off his thoughts. On the platform two kind and familiar faces waited for him. He forgot the dead man.

Eight

I

THAT EVENING Martin stood again at the platform gate in Berlin with his suitcase in his hand. The suitcase had grown heavier on the journey. He looked around for a porter. Hans rushed up to him - Martin had forgotten the boy. Gritting his teeth the little fellow lugged the heavy bag out of the station. He kept looking

sharply to right and to left in fear of the porters, for they alone had the right to work here. But to everyone the stranger said quietly: 'He is a relative.' He asked the boy whether he would like to carry the bag upstairs to his room. Hans was delighted to do so. At home it had seemed sensible not to tell his mother about this arrangement, though she looked like herself again. He himself did not know the reason why he felt so uncomfortable - he did not know that disappointment adds nothing but takes something away. She had once said shortly: 'It wasn't he.' The boy felt that merely to mention the stranger now was unnecessary and irksome. However, he liked the man, even if he did not have anything to do with his mother. At the station he had proved to be smarter than most grown-ups. He signalled for a taxi. At first Hans sat stiffly upright, then he leaned back determinedly. Martin liked the boy's face. His eyes were sparkling with excitement over the unaccustomed motor ride. He pressed his lips tightly together as if he refused to be carried away by any emotion, even joy. Martin asked a few questions: how old he was, what school he went to, whether his father was unemployed.

They drew up before a house in the Alexandrinenstrasse. Hans thought: Aha! so the man really does not live in the Buelowstrasse. That made no difference to his mother now. He shouldered the bag; the stranger lent a hand - Hans was afraid he would pay him less on that account. In the end he let the boy carry the luggage alone from the door into the room. Having chosen his pocket-knife Hans had gained courage to look around carefully at other objects in the store. He had even gone so far as to pick out several other things which he could not buy yet but which were future possibilities: a bow and arrow, an airgun, above all a wheel that gave off sparks when you turned it. When Hans saw the rocking-chair in Martin's room, he could not control himself. Flinging his legs over the arms he started rocking violently. Martin laughed and gave him the money for carrying his bags; he told him to come back the following evening. This boy, he told himself, was well adapted to any number of jobs.

At home they asked Hans where he had been so long. He took their scolding quietly but did not tell them where he had been. It did him good to have something to keep to himself, something to hide from all the grown-ups.

After a while Martin became accustomed to seeing this boy come to his house every now and then and ask for a job. Sometimes he gave him a package to deliver, sometimes a letter. At other times he sent him to meet someone at the station and to take them to a

certain house. He often gave him a present of a penny! sometimes he forgot to tip him. Hans began to feel that it was his duty to help Martin whenever he could. Frequently he had to wait till the man had finished a book or some work he was doing. The boy would sit down in the rocking-chair and chew at the cigarette Martin gave him. Sometimes he would hunt among the books and newspapers that lay around the room till he found something exciting. Much of what he read he did not understand, but he was conscious of the cigarette, the presence of this strange man, the pen scratching on the paper, the light being switched on. All this little by little contributed to a patient, expectant and calming atmosphere totally unlike his life at school, on the street, and in his mother's kitchen. Martin began to look forward to these visits. He liked to see the pointed little fox-face suddenly appear in his open doorway, always at the moment when he was angry and worried. As a matter of fact Martin was one of those people who are always angry and worried. To him the problems with which all men were being harder and harder pressed, lay centred within the four walls of a council chamber, in the stark words of a report, in the quarrel of a couple of men in that very room over those same words. In between he drew a thin line reserved for his own personal life: a letter from home – the woman he loved was not willing to wait in solitude for him for ever. Soon he would be going far away and she could not just keep on waiting indefinitely. That was his cup of bitterness, which, so he thought, had nothing to do with the bitterness of other men. And generally, just when he was most unhappy and despairing, this little boy would come in and stand there looking at him the way a child looks at a man from whom it expects the utmost. Hans was afraid of being sent away. When he was allowed to stay, his pointed little face took on a calm and knowing expression. Now and then tiny flecks of light sparkled in his grey eyes. His nose was covered with freckles, his hair was red-brown, a few strands bleached light by the sun. Martin always felt more at peace when that little boy sat in the room waiting patiently. He could read and write better when he heard the rocking-chair creak, as if it were music to soothe him.

Another frequent visitor was his landlord, Gerlach. He was a quiet, elderly man, but often so restless these days that he had to have someone to talk to. He had a very high opinion of his lodger. The little boy listened with both ears, though he did not understand much of their conversation. Usually it was about things he had heard discussed at home in the kitchen. Gerlach would come from his work, tired out and discouraged – he had kept his job because he

was a skilled workman and irreplaceable in his department. He was often wild with rage and disappointment over fruitless efforts.

'I ask you! If I lose one arm, is that any better than if the machine cuts off both my arms. And if I take a long time dying of tuberculosis, is that any better than passing out with galloping consumption? There is no choice. No man can ever force me to make a choice like that. You people ought to have put an end long ago to the gang that's making us face that alternative.'

'We shall stand together only when everyone realizes what is wrong,' said Martin. 'And to make them realize it, we have to show them. The more we try to show them, the more they hate us. The more they hate us, the less they will go along with us.'

His glance fell on the boy. Hans had put his feet down on the floor and had stopped rocking. He was trying to discover whether Triebel or his father was on Martin's side, when the two men quarrelled at home in the kitchen.

When his day had been most difficult Martin's thoughts invariably flew to that pointed little face waiting for him at home. When the boy sank his teeth into a sandwich, Martin felt the same satisfaction he had felt as a boy when he too used to come home, hungry as a bear. When he showed the boy a picture, he was amazed to find himself looking at it through Hans's young eyes, as if it were all new to him too. The same thing happened when he gave the boy a penny and at the sight of Hans's delight when he produced a sandwich from the automatic machine. He took the boy with him to a film he himself was seeing for the first time, *The Last Days of St. Petersburg*. He had already explained why Petersburg was now called Lenin-grad: Hans had listened politely and made no comment. At the film he sat motionless. His cheeks bulged with burnt almonds but he was so enthralled he forgot to chew. His mouth, usually tightly closed, fell open and showed his teeth, as if he could bite a piece out of the film: the police coming to the block of workmen's flats; the woman trying to warn her husband on his way home and hurling the first bottle at hand out of the window; the husband understanding the signal and escaping.

Martin, too, felt exactly as he had done last October. Everything that lay between seemed to have been blotted out: the bullet marks in the walls had not been chalked over, the dead had not been buried.

One afternoon Marie watched, smiling, as her boy examined his blue shirt and red tie in the mirror.

'Where did that come from?' she asked.

'Someone lent it to me,' he said and added; 'Oskar Berger.'

Oskar had once come up to the flat with Hans for a few moments: a sleepy, rather sulky, but obviously good boy with a long neck and bulging eyes. Hans took pains not to tell his mother how he had made this acquaintance. Oskar was the nephew of Martin's landlord. Father Berger was in the same brigade with Gerlach. There was a Mother Berger with an equally long neck and equally bulging eyes. The whole family was thoroughly decent and upright. Heiner, the elder brother, was out of work; he was short and squat like his father and he looked everyone squarely in the eye.

Hans twisted and turned to right and to left, obviously pleased with his appearance. Suddenly his father burst out in an angry tone: 'Who tied that thing on him?'

'Let him alone,' said Marie. 'He likes it and it protects his shirt.'

'That's probably what the S.A. mothers say when they see their sons looking at themselves in the mirror,' growled Geschke.

Marie lowered her eyes. She heard the reproach in her husband's words. Recently Frau Melzer had reported seeing the eldest boy, Franz, in a strange part of the town surrounded by a group of Nazis. They probably held their meetings as far from home as possible to avoid recriminations from their families. And Geschke, coming in at that moment, had said:

'Because it's easier to plunder strange houses and to smash up working men in a strange quarter than their own neighbours.'

Marie regretted now that she was such a stupid woman and did not read the papers and know what was going on. But one thing she knew definitely: her own boy must not become involved with a gang that attacked and beat up working men in strange parts of the city because they were afraid of their fathers at home. She also reproached herself for not having paid as much attention to her stepson as his own mother would have done.

She was glad that Hans would still have to go to school for a number of years: that meant a certain amount of steadiness in his life. Twice weekly the big children went with their father to draw the dole. Franz complained because everyone could see that his trousers had been patched.

'I can't buy you new ones now,' Marie said sadly.

'You could have mended them better,' Franz grumbled.

Geschke flew into a rage, but Marie caught his hand - he was free with his blows these days. She said: 'I've mended it as well as I could. I cut up one of my own old dresses to get good pieces to patch it with. I can't help it if the colour isn't exactly the same.'

'Do you mean you're asking this booby's pardon?' cried Geschke.

At this Franz cried out in real despair:

'Yes, but Susi just promised to go with me and not with Herbert, and he's her chap. I talked myself hoarse till Loerke let me scrub the steps so as I could get enough money to ask Susi to have a cup of coffee on Sunday. Now I'll have to walk out with her with a sheet of pictures on my tail.'

Marie did not say a word. Hans sat studying his lessons at the window: thank goodness, he did not care how he looked yet. The atmosphere in the darkening room, more than the words, oppressed him. He began to think how he could manage to slip out. When Geschke had gone, Marie gave the eldest son his father's Sunday shirt. She had taken such good care of it that it was still in excellent condition. She told herself it was natural the boy should be upset. He was a handsome boy, tall and straight – all the more reason for him to suffer in his shabby rags.

On Sunday Franz thought to himself: It's a good thing you always let a girl walk ahead of you. In that way he could keep her from seeing the light patch on his grey trousers. But he was not wholly at ease till they were seated at Aschingers.

A few weeks ago he had met an old acquaintance at a Welfare Centre. Franz had instantly recognized the tall, clean-shaven man who stood in the row ahead of him. A man changes in outward appearance less in the years between twenty and thirty than between ten and twenty. Franz had no difficulty in recognizing his former teacher, Degreif, whom he had worshipped as a boy. Degreif, however, did not recognize Franz even when he greeted him with a happy smile. Franz remembered how this straight, fair-haired schoolmaster, who was still young, had told his class what the Mark Brandenburg had stood for a thousand years ago. It had made Franz realize that he was not only part of a family, part of the neighbourhood life, but also part of a nation. Gradually it dawned on Degreif that this must be the tousled-headed little fellow who used to sit on the front bench.

'Do you mean to say you haven't had any work since you left school?'

'Yes, sir. And you?'

'When I was there you must have been in the next to last class. I was dismissed – reward for winning the Iron Cross First Class.'

'In my brother's school,' said Franz, 'they've put two classes together. Think of that! Sixty boys, just as if they didn't need teachers any more.'

'Because, instead of appointing a few teachers permanently, the government spends all its money on paying reparations.'

'D'you know, Herr Degreif,' said Franz, 'you were a wonderful teacher. To my mind a real genius. I can't understand why they didn't leave you in the school.'

'I'm just the sort they got rid of first,' said Degreif.

'Why?'

'Because I taught you boys a concept of the Fatherland. They let the Reds preach Marxism a little longer: the Jews are inclined to shut an eye to it.'

The long line moved slowly from the street into the corridor. Degreif walked sideways to keep his face turned towards his pupil. It hurt Franz to think that his beloved teacher was as badly off as he himself. Degreif had the same feeling when he looked at the boy. 'I'm sorrier for you,' he said 'than for myself . . . a boy as strong and upright as you!'

He pulled his forelock – an old habit of his. 'You'll get a job more easily than I will, for you're young. It's all wrong for you to have to stand here in a queue; it's against all laws of decency.'

Franz listened in amazement: he had already surmised much of this but had never heard it put into words, by his father, his mother, or his girl, Susi. That he had to wear a patch on his trousers, and stand in line for the dole, was much more than wrong – it was against the highest laws. He felt a warm surge of love for his teacher: so far everything Degreif had said was true.

'Just count the number of Jews standing here,' Degreif said.

'You can't always tell them,' Franz said hesitatingly. 'Here in this quarter there are very few of them. There are far more in the slums.'

'My boy, if there really are many there, they are sure to go to Welfare bureaux to keep people from knowing they have money in the bank.'

Franz looked at his teacher in surprise. Fleeting memories of Degreif's teaching passed through his mind: the grain of seed which the wind blows across the land till it finally comes to rest in a crack in the courtyard pavement; the Rhine that rises in the Black Forest and runs through the Bodensee and, when it comes out, is still the same Rhine that for thousands of years has been flowing to the sea and will go on flowing for thousands of years more. Why should his teacher, who knew so many true and beautiful things, suddenly know something so completely opposite? Then it turned out that Degreif had been a Nazi for a long time. He had a very low number.

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on the list of registered Nazis. At that time – he had not been much older than Franz was now – fresh from the war with the Iron Cross and no job, he had needed help and comfort just like the boy beside him. It had comforted him, as it now comforted Franz, to learn from someone that he was destined for higher things. There had never been any doubt of it in his own mind – then as little as now. It had been obvious to him as it now was to Franz that he was worth more than the ragged and the unemployed and that he did not share this privilege with humanity at large, but only with his own people. Since then he had listened to other ideologies, even when they reached him from afar, with nothing but suspicion. They might rob him of his special prerogative that sustained him even through hunger and misery – the knowledge that he belonged to a privileged nation. To Franz he said: 'That, at least, no one can take from us.'

Franz went home with his teacher.

'I'm still one of those old-fashioned schoolmasters,' said Degreif. 'I like to keep in touch with my pupils all through life. I'm afraid you might fall victim to false prophets at home and become imbued with the wrong ideas. I should like to protect you, my boy, from all the heresies you may hear about class struggle, solidarity; you have no right to feel one with all those thugs and beggars – only with the strong and upright. That is the best way to help your country.'

Degreif and his wife had gone to live with his in-laws, former teachers themselves, now pensioned. Though the apartment they shared was small and, with the two grandchildren, as full as Geschke's flat, Franz was intensely conscious of the vast difference between these people and his own. In the immaculate living room above the bookshelves hung pictures he recognized: Bismarck, Luther, Goethe. Over the sofa – one could not see that it served as a bed at night – hung a signed photograph of Hitler. When Franz left, Degreif presented him with a tie pin in the form of a swastika. Franz pinned it on his coat, because he was wearing an open shirt. When he reached home he stopped outside the door and took it off – he was afraid of his father and the neighbours.

Two weeks later, in the Jugendheim, he saw the same swastika on the flag, only many times enlarged. He stared at it in amazement, not in anger or disgust. All that had happened many months before the quarrel with his parents over the patched trousers. His mother was not to blame for his shabbiness – that he knew. Afterwards, he felt sorry for her. But she was so stupid he could not explain to her privately what his teacher Degreif had told him.

Hans had been looking forward to the outing with his friend Oskar Berger, who was the nephew of Martin's landlord, and partly dreading the strange surroundings.

It was a cold autumn night. The children crowded around the hearth in the Youth Shelter. One of the boys played the accordion, and a very pretty girl played the mandoline. She had a small voice, a rather husky contralto. The boys shouted at the accordion player to stop that racket. Could this girl who sang so charmingly be the girl they had all known? They gazed at her as if she were not an ordinary girl but a heavenly apparition. She sang one song after the other in her light little voice, just as the tunes happened to come into her head, unselfconsciously, her thoughts only of the song that poured from her throat, on the warmth of the fire and the pleasure of being all together. In the dim light her hair gleamed on her forehead. Hans thought of his mother. At the same time it occurred to him that he had often seen this girl in the house next door. She went to his Tante Emilie's workshop every morning. He had not dreamt she could be so bewitching. He discovered another familiar face in the dark, tousle-haired boy whose father had a second-hand shop on the Zimmerstrasse. He was a hunchback and wore spectacles; the other boys tormented and teased him. It seemed funny to Hans to see this boy sharing the warmth, the songs and the soup with him, instead of running away from him, or peering out from the safety of his father's shop-door with a sad, disdainful expression on his face. The girl passed her mandoline to another girl who was not so pretty but had a clear voice. Then they all sang together. Some of the children wanted to play out of doors and Hans joined them in a race.

Berger had told them that the open meadow now belonged to Hans and his companions. The meadow bordered the east side of the highway, to the west lay stubbly fields that seemed in the moonlight to be covered with hoar-frost. Northward and southward two points of land ran respectively into the pine forest and towards the lake. One or two empty soldiers' barracks stood near the large hut known as the Youth Shelter. Through the doorway faint lights shone here and there. From within came the sound of singing. One of the older boys, breathless from racing with the younger children, suggested building a fire. A couple of lads were sent off for faggots. Hans had never been out of doors at night – at least only across the street. How big the world was – as if it had spread out in the dark and every light meant people! Sometimes at home he had gone out on the balcony and looked at the stars. His teacher had told him

they were worlds. If he was right, the sky was filled with worlds. Why did he, Hans, happen to be running about on just this particular world? Why not up there on another? A small boy outran him and gathered wood faster than he did. The small boy also knew how to build up the faggots and light a huge bundle of them. Hans had never seen a fire in the open before. The snapping and crackling went through and through him – he felt as if he crackled with it. Up there on one of the stars maybe someone was lighting a fire too. He sat motionless with excitement: something deep within him longed to burn like the fire. He felt as if a host of tiny sparks inside him were trying to get out. At that moment he noticed that the boy who had helped him gather faggots was really a girl: she wore her hair cut short and she had a short little turned-up nose. As she sang – songs he had never heard before – she wrinkled her forehead. He also discovered the girl who had sung alone in the Shelter. She was sitting now on the outer rim in the shadows; a little firelight fell across her knees which were drawn up and leaning against the clasped knees of her tall friend. In Hans's head songs and fire were mingled with all the good things that had so far come to him in life: his mother's face, his friend Martin's cone-shaped head, certain visits to the cinema, and pictures from the everyday life to which he belonged. He moved over to the lean, elderly man, who began to tell them about the stars. As the fire burnt low, they strolled off in groups to their barracks. A few boys gathered around the lean, elderly man, among them Hans and the hunchbacked boy. He asked the most questions and knew most about the stars. A tall boy flung his arm around the other boy's hump. That night Hans slept in the straw under the same blanket with Berger, the nephew of Martin's landlord.

When Geschke came home from work and found that neither of the boys was back yet, he flew into a rage. Marie was busy with work she had brought home from Tante Emilie's shop. Helene, the daughter, who had learned to sew beautifully at the school for adults, was also at home on Sundays. She still had no young man because she was so homely. Everyone took it for granted that she would help with the work.

Franz, the elder brother, went with Degreif to another part of Berlin in another Youth Shelter. There, all Sunday, he was as happy as Hans had been in his. The boys sang songs there too, and they built a fire. The same stars twinkled above them, filling Franz's heart with awe and wonder. He too had been surprised to see familiar faces from his own street. Later the boys had quarrelled over who

should carry the furled flag – there was a law forbidding anyone to carry the flag unfurled through the streets of Berlin. For a while they had defied the law and, after sending lookouts ahead and to the rear, had carried it unfurled for a short distance. Degreif said softly to the Youth Leader:

‘It’s not forbidden any more.’

‘Don’t say anything,’ the other replied. ‘It’s more fun for them.’

This group ran into the hunchbacked, bespectacled little boy in the subway. Quick as a flash they drew the Star of David with chalk on his hump.

Because he was afraid of his father, Franz hid his insignia before he entered the flat. Marie could tell from the sounds he made that the first boy to return was not her own.

The eldest and the youngest came home on Sundays in the best of moods. Marie smiled to hear little Hans laugh. But when, at night, she heard Franz laughing as he said good-night to his friends, she always felt uneasy, though she could not have said why. It was no wonder that the two boys were constantly running off. Geschke sat at home as silent and cold as a lump of ice. He would brood for hours at a time, then, without warning, jump up and start quarrelling furiously. That was what had happened with Triebel. The two men had always enjoyed arguing together. Triebel had been Geschke’s neighbour as long as he could remember, and they had also been together in the war. But after their last quarrel Triebel had never come back to the flat. They had quarrelled about the people’s decision against the Prussian government. Geschke had flown out at him:

‘That’s something I never would have thought you fellows would do! Put your names on a list with such scoundrels! Just because they’re against our Party and our Minister. You sell yourselves to a lot of blackguards for the sake of getting them out of office! You’re all tarred with the same brush.’

‘Shut up!’ Triebel had said, controlling himself as much as he could. ‘They want a government that will ruin our nation as fast as possible: we want a new government that will finally be of some use to us.’

Marie listened attentively, trying to understand which one was right. She did not like to question Geschke afterwards: he was numb with bitterness. Nor had she a chance to run down to Triebel again. His wife would have been more patient than her husband and could have explained much to her in detail. But this time Triebel went out

and slammed Marie's kitchen door furiously. This time, too, Geschke had said: 'I won't have him up here again.'

She lay with her arms crossed under her head, waiting, till she heard little Hans come in and creep into bed with his brother.

Geschke was not asleep either. Where had the two boys been all this time? Weren't they together? Did they come in separately? Boys of that age would fall for any old fraud. They grumbled if their father ordered them to do anything at home. But away from home they obeyed orders. Who was reaching out greedy hands after his sons, more covetously even than their own father?

II

The more depressed Wenzlow was the more he kept it to himself. In his head there was a secret stronghold known only to himself and tightly locked against all intruders, not only against his wife and his friends, but against himself in all but the most private moments when he felt no one was watching him. At night when his wife lay sound asleep, or sometimes after the day's work, when he seemed to be reading but was actually staring at his paper, he silently turned the key to his secret stronghold. In it he kept no treasures, no love affairs, no memories that must be hidden from the eyes of the world. It was a treasure chamber of another sort, if fear of life, fear of the future and despondency can be called treasures.

With curiosity and a secret hope he would not admit even to himself, he listened to what Boland, an old friend he had met at manoeuvres, had to tell him. Boland had a relative who had gone out to China two years before and had a job there building up the new army. He mentioned well-known names, men who had good connections and could back their efforts. He himself had put in for leave in order to make up his mind at once. Wenzlow knew as much about East Asia as about the planet Saturn. At first he hid the maps and books Boland lent him. Ilse, his wife, was astonished at her husband's suddenly detailed replies to questions on various matters she had read about in the newspaper. She could not recall the name of the man out there in the Far East who was trying to make a strong new nation out of his old land. She certainly thought it strange that the foreign yellow people should have the same problems as people had at home, but it was clear to her that the man with the difficult name needed a strong army to drive the Reds out of his land. If he wanted to build up a new and powerful government, the Reds would have to be liquidated, and for that he would need trained soldiers.

For months Wenzlow was content with an explanation now and then. Thanks to his new outlook, about which no one knew anything, he felt happier than ever before. He had almost forgotten his sullen father who had so embittered his youth. Boland quickly made up his mind to accept his relative's offer. On Wenzlow's account as well as his own he got in touch with officers under whom he had formerly served and who were now in command in the Far East.

Wenzlow had never been enterprising or imaginative. But in this prospect, vague though it was, he saw a means of escape from his narrow, circumscribed life, every promotion, every step of which he knew in advance up to the day of his retirement and even of his death. Had it not been for this hope he would have been weighed down with responsibility. Now he was like a seafarer who, no matter where he may wander, feels secure in the midst of his family again.

Wenzlow and his wife would not have wanted any more children, had not Heaven, as they said to each once in a while at night, so far denied them a son. In their particular case, however, Providence had stuck to daughters.

Wenzlow now had to make frequent trips to Berlin. It began to look as though he would soon leave for the East.

Of his own accord he would never have found the way out of the impasse he was in. He had no talent, no love of travel, no wealth of ideas, unless it be that secret dread of a future obviously heading for chaos. Now he was offered a way of escape – almost as if a secret power had seized the dignified, calm, and no longer youthful Wenzlow by an invisible lapel. Boland was the emissary Fate had chosen to help him.

'I could see you were really glad to have a tip,' Boland told him. 'You'd also like a chance to show that you're brave and enterprising. There are places on this earth where such demonstrations are badly needed.'

This time Ilse Wenzlow did not go home to Potsdam, but gave birth to her child in her own house in Hanover. Tante Amalie received the news that a son had been born. Never had Lenore Klemm seen such an expression of unalloyed joy on her aunt's face. True, Tante Amalie's joy looked more like a grimace, for the old lady's features were not made to express tender emotions. At first she tried hard to hide her overpowering happiness, which seemed, even to herself, excessive. At night in the bed in which she had slept alone all her life, indulging only on rare occasions in a thought too dazzling for the light of day, Tante Amalie gave free rein to the pride of an ancestress who sees her race flourishing. It was obvious

now that she had given only a half-hearted affection to Lenore's son. Since his father's accidental death, Helmut had been making his home here with his mother. Tante Amalie had eyes only for the newborn babe who, as the heir, would bear her name.

The boy, Helmut, spent his holidays with his relatives in the house in Elteville. Fortunately Uncle Klemm had not yet made any effort to prolong his ward's visits unduly; he had boys of his own and worries enough. He was already anxious about the demands this boy might make on the business to the detriment of his own sons. From the first Tante Amalie had been opposed to what she called Rhenish holidays. The boy always came back so changed, so talkative – thus she described his liking for fun and gaiety. Moreover, he was utterly spoiled, as was plain from his outspoken preference for certain dishes, for unusual excursions and such like. At those times his mother would look at him with big, wondering eyes. Nowadays she relieved Tante Amalie of all the housework and gardening. Lenore could have drawn sufficient income to pay for servants, but she shrank from using the money that came from her unfortunate marriage. She accepted only as much as she needed for the boy.

Visitors were in the habit of saying, with a smile, that Lenore was beginning to look more and more like her aunt. Her slender, taut figure had lost every vestige of its former charm. Her eyes were always dull now: they no longer changed colour with her emotions. Now and then at night her light burned late in her room. The novels she secretly read she hid during the day from her aunt, just as she had done as a young girl. In the morning she always looked tired. If anyone had watched her as she read, they would have seen how, at certain places in the story, her eyes turned now greenish, not dark. But only the little librarian knew her taste in reading. Lenore never thought of Lieven now. The brief love affair seemed to her in retrospect an unavoidable fever of her troubled youth. She had no idea where Lieven was now – and she did not care. His ambition to leave his mark permanently on her life had resulted only in the titles of a few books that had stuck in her memory. She was happy only when she was reading. She was sure that all the passions described in books really existed in life, only books ended just where life began. Every time she put down a book she felt that, at the end, the true story, which was not worth writing and reading, really began. She formed the habit of imagining the real end for herself: love lost, the relapse into the monotony of everyday life, the inevitable trap.

She was glad to see her brother, Fritz, when he suddenly arrived

in Berlin. He was, she felt, the only human being with whom she could speak freely. But she soon realized that he was absorbed in his military affairs and in his own family. When he talked of his family, he invariably told little anecdotes about his young son. Above all, she realized that, even if her brother had wanted to talk things over with her, she could not have unburdened herself to him. She had not the least idea what those talks she had looked forward to should be about.

Tante Amalie was happier than ever. She brought out two bottles of wine she had been saving for just such an occasion. She had been unable to attend the christening because she had no money of her own and had refused to take any from Lenore, because it was Klemm's money. Now, however, she was proud to offer her old wine to her neighbours and to several of her nephew's brother officers. Everyone drank toasts to the newborn son. On one point all agreed: the child's future would be much easier than his father's life had been. The war the little fellow would have to fight when he grew up could never end in a Versailles. By the time this little boy was big enough to understand what the Fatherland was, Germany would have emerged from its shame. An officer would once again hold the position he had held in the old days. Tante Amalie was proud to be the only woman among the men. Frau von Malzahn had gone home, her niece had excused herself on some pretext, and Lenore always went to bed as early as possible to be alone and read. Tante Amalie held her chin high above her stand-up collar.

'Well,' cried Malzahn, 'perhaps it's better than nothing that the League of Nations has finally agreed to a larger Reichswehr.'

'No,' replied Stachwitz – when he was off duty he always joined Wenzlow – 'worse. It's a way of softening the indignity – a trick to distract our thoughts that might otherwise be fixed on re-establishing military service.'

Tante Amalie nodded to show that she agreed with Stachwitz. He had always been her favourite among Wenzlow's friends. Old Malzahn remarked that general military service was the only way to put an end to this dilettante nonsense, the whole S.A. business. The only thing they knew about drill they had learned from a few retired officers like Roehm, for instance, who had learned hardly anything in Bolivia but had been trained to be a captain of brigands.

'I can't agree with you,' Fritz Wenzlow said to his father-in-law. 'This whole movement is just a boiling up of something we haven't been able to throttle in our young men. The boys are proud to carry a gun. They have found out for themselves that without arms a man

demoralized. They have submitted to discipline of their own accord.'

Old Malzahn turned to his son-in-law with a twinkle of amusement in his eye:

'My boy, I can remember that you were of a very different opinion on your last visit when we talked about the officers' trials. At that time you had harsh words for the young men who were setting up their cells in the army.'

'That was quite different. That was done secretly. It was conspiracy. But the strength now being shown will stand the army in good stead.'

'We'll see. So far it suits me better to see them fight among themselves. You weren't here at the time of the Stinnes affair.'

'Yes, but Hitler crushed them. They all toed the mark quickly enough. And this example just shows you who is right. Their military order is replacing the military chaos among our people.'

Stachwitz said nothing. He had had a reply on the tip of his tongue when the talk turned to the man who had been close to him. He choked it back. Malzahn said, as he always did when no other answer occurred to him: 'Wait and see.'

The boy, Helmut sat in a corner, keeping as quiet as possible lest his aunt remember his presence and send him to bed. He did not quite understand what the conversation was about, but he followed every word eagerly. He was now twelve years old. In his class at school the boys often argued about similar questions. There were boys who wrote home the jokes they had heard about the S.A. There were others, too, like Braun, who kept a Hitler picture hidden away in their satchel and took it secretly to bed with them at night. Boys like Braun were always telling one, on the side, that Hitler would have to save the Fatherland. Their lives that had seemed so grey and monotonous would become brilliant and exciting. Recently there had been an accident at recess. A certain Gustav Helmer, the son of a physician, had denounced the S.A. as thugs and Hitler as the biggest of all. Whereupon Braun swung his fist and knocked out one of Helmer's front teeth. Helmer's father came to the school to complain, but the headmaster had taken Braun's part - the boys were beyond the age when they could be forbidden to fight.

Young Klemm was on Braun's side: he heartily disliked old Malzahn, who refused to recognize Hitler. The boy had always cherished a secret fondness for his dead father, though he could not remember much about him. Once his uncle in Elteville had hinted

that even in the early days his father had expected great things of Hitler. The boy was ready to revere any of his father's opinions. Now he also took Uncle Wenzlow into his heart because he defended Hitler. In his excitement he began to twist and plait the tablecloth fringe. Tante Amalie cried:

'Why! You're still up!'

Wenzlow added to his nephew's devotion by saying good-naturedly: 'Oh, let him stay. Tomorrow is Sunday.'

III

Lieven was glad he was now earning enough to rent a nicely furnished room on the Kaiserdamm, this time in a house that looked out on the street. In wartime it was all one to him whether he slept in hay or on the bare ground – that was part of the job – but in peace he yearned for surroundings more in keeping with his tastes and habits. He was relieved to be rid of the fat little landlady. His new landlady had also been obliged to let rooms to make ends meet. But she was a sensible woman, wore her hair plainly, dressed well, and showed no tendency towards effusiveness, or towards lessening the distance between herself and her lodger. Such tendencies, Lieven believed, had some connection with loss of one's earthly possessions. After all, even he had listened patiently to Luettgens's confession nights on the sofa; even he had revealed more of his own experiences and reflections than he liked to remember.

Now at last he was rid of his friend's nightly chattering, as well as of the short-haired landlady's gossip. She had been deeply moved when she bade him good-bye. As a farewell present she gave him a pillow embroidered with a swastika. Lieven detested all symbols of political creeds, even pictures of leaders. Fortunately, he was not obliged to hang up any on his walls because he was still allowed to conceal his party membership from his former comrades and their groups. 'Now if I were only an Italian,' he thought. 'Mussolini at least has something of the *condottiere* about him; in the worst photographs he looks like a picture by Mantegna or an early Renaissance painter.'

'One of these days,' Luettgens replied, 'we will carve our symbols in flesh and iron. Until then, you can't stop silly women from embroidering them.'

Little Luettgens was thankful Lieven had paid for his room two months in advance. He could now sleep in the bed instead of on the sofa. One by one his efforts to find a job had failed. The dole was as humiliating to him as a whipping-post.

Lieven had no sweetheart with whom he cared to spend his vacation, so he wrote to his Cousin Otto Lieven that he longed to see him again. Not that he really had such a desire - he merely wanted for once to feel like that about someone.

He glanced round the compartment, bored. A middle-aged, respectable married couple; a gentleman with a pointed beard like a doctor's; an elderly woman knitting as if she had not a minute to lose; a young girl dressed in black. He looked at the girl closely to see whether she were pretty. He could not make up his mind. The slender, heart-shaped face, and the hair that came to a widow's peak on her forehead, would have been charming if the face had not been spoiled by an expression of mockery and utter coldness. The circles under her eyes might just as well have been produced by sleepless nights of nursing the person for whom she wore mourning as by other cause. Her eyes were beautiful, almost radiant. 'But I never saw eyes that shone like ice before,' thought Lieven. Didn't the girl in black notice that the Vandyke beard beside her was pressing her foot? The Vandyke beard's clothes reeked so strongly of chloroform that, in a short time, the compartment smelt like a doctor's consulting-room. The girl crossed one leg over the other, but did not draw back her foot. A short time afterwards she left the compartment: the Vandyke beard followed. When, later on, Lieven went into the dining car to get a drink, the girl in black and the Vandyke beard were having coffee together and smoking. To his amazement he heard the girl laugh out loud several times. More than once from his seat at the end of the car, he heard the same laughter, clear and mocking, and yet almost melancholy. He did not know whether she had noticed him. Nor did he have a chance to find out. The train was approaching his station and it was time to go back to his compartment and get his travelling-bag.

He was still thinking fitfully of the girl as he walked the long stretch from the station to the village. He remembered her hands lying lightly in her lap; not soft hands, but the hands of an aristocrat. Her laughter had been close to tears.

It was almost nightfall when he reached Olmuetz. Every window was ablaze with lights to welcome him. During his absence the little house had rested snugly under its roof, as if it had nestled down a little deeper into the earth. The carved shield with the family crest above the entrance looked as if it had weathered. It was as if centuries had passed since Lieven's last visit. Then the dormant plants had been mere bulbs. Here everything seemed to grow faster than elsewhere.

His cousin welcomed him with open arms. He had been looking forward eagerly to this visit. The smell of the house reminded Lieven of that sense of well-being that always came over him when, as a child on holiday, he had breathed in the familiar odour of the great hall. His cousin's room had not changed since the last visit. No getting away from him here either, thought Lieven, as he discovered a volume of Spengler and a volume of Van der Bruck. They had found their way here like seeds borne by winds to far-off places.

A burst of laughter came from the corner of the sofa. Lieven swung round. For the first time he noticed that he was not alone with his cousin. He stared at the girl in black, the girl who had been on his train.

'We all reek of chloroform,' she said, 'we travelled with a doctor.'

Otto Lieven said: 'I don't believe you recognize my sister.'

'Yes, Cousin, I can hardly remember you, but I remember your doll very well. It was absurdly big and always in the way.'

'I remember the doll too.' Her face softened – and he saw now that she was beautiful. 'I even dragged her around with me, I don't know how long, when we had to escape. Then she got left behind in a train that had been shot up. My mother and I escaped with many others to a village that had not yet been occupied by the Reds. Mother's manservant was shot trying to save our luggage. My mother wept, and so did I. But I did not tell anyone that I was really crying for my doll.'

'Our mother died last month in Dresden. To pay the doctor's bill, Elisabeth has taken a position in the hospital on the Buehler Höhe,' Otto Lieven explained.

'I want to stay there,' Elisabeth said quickly. 'You will see me here every vacation. No, don't say anything yet. We're not going to begin quarrelling in front of our cousin. I have no intention of ever being a burden to you. My brother is always afraid I might somehow come to harm. To him I am still his little sister – which is quite right, in a way. Only to me he is still my little brother who needs my protection much more than I do his.' She made a little face. 'Do you remember how we used to play at night near a pit? Each kept warning the other not to run off too far. We were both equally afraid to be alone.'

Her brother laughed and kissed her. He said: 'Ernst and I had a chance to see all that again – the lake and the house and the pit. Once we looked down from a hilltop on the estate.'

'And thought we would be home in a few hours,' Ernst Lieven said; 'instead we were thrown back. You were wounded.'

She listened closely as her brother described his meeting with the peasant family that had been reared on the estate. Ernst Lieven said:

'I saw them all again during the retreat. They lay about the room, riddled with bullets. The child, the only one uninjured, was climbing about in the ruins, eating the remains of the breakfast. She may be as old as you, Cousin; she would certainly be a pretty girl.'

At this Otto put an arm around his sister. 'Not so beautiful as she is.'

Ernst Lieven looked hard at the girl: 'If I am not mistaken, she had something you lack, Elisabeth.'

'What?'

'Warmth.'

If he had counted on finding a trace of confusion in her features, he was deceived.

She answered calmly: 'I don't know where in this land I could have found a fire to warm myself by.'

'It is our land,' said Otto Lieven. 'You are at home wherever you are.'

'Don't be angry with me, brother! I know I am not as big a person as you. But, to a little girl like me, the Fatherland is far too powerful. What my eyes can see is enough for me – the garden, the lake, our woods. In fact, exactly what you saw that time when you looked down from the hilltop. I wouldn't know what to do with all those cities and big rivers you say are all my Fatherland.' She sat down in her corner. The two men went on talking casually.

'What about the schoolmaster with his long arms and legs?'

'Since you were here we have really become friends. I have learned a lot of things from him I did not understand before. And he from me. Our arguments were worth while. I lost some of my prejudices and a lot of pride, and he, the wild dreamer, the "greetings of the whole world".'

He waited a moment for Lieven's reply. As none was forthcoming, he went on: 'At last he understands what I have always tried to tell him; that all his International Associations will never hold together. A new war will always break them up because one nation invariably pits its strength against another. As for me, I know now that I have not a single thought in my head no matter how exalted, how original, which I do not owe to my nation.'

'Now he is in full swing,' thought Lieven: 'I'll just have to wait till he is through.' Elisabeth, from her corner, watched her brother, her head in her hand. She had a tender, gently mocking smile on

her lips, like a mother watching her child, no matter what it happens to be playing with.

'It is the nation,' he went on, excited at being able to express to his visitors thoughts he usually kept to himself. 'The nation that works the fields and mines and coal and at the same time through the centuries keeps speaking its language, composing music, painting, building cathedrals. It is the nation that goes on mobilizing armies, and producing great writers and statesmen, not to mention individuals like you and me.'

'So, even on my holiday I have to hear almost the same stuff as at home,' thought Lieven. Aloud he said: 'You and I have become National Socialists and neither of us knew about the other.'

'Certainly by two very different paths; and our friend, the teacher, by a third. He knows he can play the tune of a foreign nation on his violin, but that he can never compose. He feels that he is as much of a patriot as I am. And that I am as socialistic as he. In that you can see the greatness of the man who has built up our party. One roof over all heads.'

Ernst Lieven thought: 'Not too solid a roof, I hope.'

The evenings were less boring than he had feared, because Lieven's sister usually sat in her corner. She parried questions firmly; refusing to be drawn into an argument with Ernst Lieven alone. At the most, she would give him a brief glance which seemed to say: 'We two are in agreement in this house; we are not going to let ourselves be seduced by their bitter earnestness. We won't accept their sacred convictions and their programmes and their vows.'

The schoolmaster devoured with his eyes the beautiful young stranger who had suddenly appeared in his village.

On the last evening she came up to Ernst Lieven's room. 'I will say good-bye to you now.' Well as he usually understood women, this visit surprised him. She went up close to him:

'I like you,' she said, then retreated a step and leaned against the wall. Immediately she began to talk as if that had been her purpose in coming to his room.

'We fled from the bullet-riddled train and I had to leave my doll behind. We fled from village to village, my mother and I, to any sort of a haven and the Reds were always after us. That was the time our own estate was burned. Our father was beaten to death; we learned that much later. Sometimes my mother would stand still; and, instead of resting, she would kiss me. We came to the harbour. We came to Stettin. I had had nothing to eat for two days,

my mother even longer than that because she gave everything to me. She took me into the first inn she came to. In the street she had combed her hair, taken her rings out of her handbag and put them on, her earrings too. We ate till we could not eat any more. But we had no money: we could not pay. One of the guests noticed us. When the waiter began to make a fuss, he rose and came over to us. He paid for everything and begged us, "Excuse me for disturbing you." Later he paid for our lodging too; he even gave my mother the money to send me to a boarding-school. In the end he had to go far away. Then his friend looked after my mother. When I came home holidays, I was always so happy with my beautiful mother. She was very good. Later she fell ill. For a while the friend continued to pay for the doctor and also for my schooling. But finally he realized that this illness might last indefinitely. Then the Dresden doctor gave me a job in payment for the hospital bills. My mother kept saying:

"Don't let your brother know anything; don't become a burden to him."

"Then my mother died. I was not so lucky as she had been. I did not find any men who paid for everything, then clicked their heels and said: "Excuse me for disturbing you."

"The head doctor let me keep my job. I know my way about there now. I am the receptionist; I manage very well with the salary for myself alone. I do not need a friend to help me. That is to say, unless I like someone very much."

She rubbed the back of her head against the wall and touched one of her earrings:

"My mother carried these in her pocket on our flight. She was determined not to sell them. She wanted to leave them to me. I should like to go back home just once more. I wish just once we could have everything as it used to be at home if only for an hour. I don't know and I don't even care what is going to happen. Nothing else matters to me."

IV

From the moment Wilhelm Nadler saw Freiherr von Ziesen at the Goebbels rally in the Sportpalast, and noticed that he followed the speech just as intently as he himself did, the idol he had set up in his heart began to totter. However, he could not quite make up his mind to displace him permanently. Nadler did not know enough about this new and widely heralded idea. He needed as substitute a

tangible man of flesh and blood. Ideas have messengers, representatives, agents. It rubbed him the wrong way to be subordinate to a man like Farmer Harms, the S.A. group leader. Harms already had a certain following among some of the boys in this village and also in the next where he owned property, but in such bad repair that it was about to be sold for taxes. Wilhelm Nadler himself was constantly on the verge of ruin; this was one reason why he longed for a symbol to revere, at least in his thoughts. He was not quite sure about this new idea: for the present he was inclined to cling to the old.

He was even pleased when, that winter, there was a rumour in the village that the house on the opposite side of the lake had been renovated. He did not know that he owed Ziesen's return to the fact that the Baron had lost a great deal of money in the bank crash. His last great expense had been for his daughter's wedding; the girl had just managed to get Lothar, a braggart who had a way with the women, for a husband. Fortunately Ziesen could avoid the awkward matter of the usual dowry, the town flat, and the trousseau because this Lothar was leaving for Afghanistan in the consular service and taking his wife with him. Nadler had, of course, no conception of problems such as these, but the things that did matter to him were, if anything, even more complicated. He still felt under some obligation not because he and Herr von Ziesen shared the same belief in the same goal, but out of a sort of loyalty. He could not simply sever the threads that bound him to his old symbol. True, it occurred to him that, in the coming presidential election, one ought not to vote again for Hindenburg. Why did Hindenburg, who was as Protestant as the Hohenzollerns, think so much of this Bruening? Nadler hated Bruening because of his support for the East programme, as if there were not enough poor farmers here at home. But Bruening certainly knew how to butter up Hindenburg, who was now a doddering old man. Nadler listened to Ziesen's speeches before the heads of the *Vaterlandischen Landleute* at the hotel by the lake. He carefully noted all the points that would impress his followers at the 'Eiche'; it was important to swing the whole village for Duesterberg, the Stahlheim candidate. A prepossessing man, his picture was posted on every corner. They would find out tonight how many still stood by Hindenburg. Pictures do not grow old. Hindenburg looked just as fresh in his as he had five years ago when Nadler himself had pinned them up. Under the old man's rule life had grown worse day by day. The road-workers must have put up Thaelmann: there was no one in the

whole village cheeky enough for that. He wanted them to fill up all the furrows between the fields as they did in Russia. Wilhelm Nadler was in fear and trembling lest he might be forced to shift his furrows. The Hitler poster was still intact. There was no sign of Hitler on it, only a man and a woman, some married couple or other, both in want, both at the end of their tether. You could see that the man and woman were both genuine. The woman had thick blonde hair; she would have been even prettier than Liese if she had not looked so sad and worried. Liese was always merry, even after he had beaten her. The man was sad and worried too. He was one of the unemployed, but looked as though he had been a soldier. It was too bad about the man. At the bottom of the poster it said that in cases like this a man must vote for the National Socialist Party. Nadler himself had been so pleased with this Goebbels that he would have liked nothing better than to enrol in his party at once. He had hoped that Freiherr von Ziesen would put an end to his irresolution by going over to the Nazis voluntarily after that evening. But he had remained where he was. Nadler, therefore, at his behest, put up the Stahlheim poster.

Then, one day before the election, Nadler had a great surprise at his own farm. On his own barn door someone had posted one of the Communist placards: 'Vote for Hindenburg and you vote for Hitler.' Who was so well acquainted with the farm that he knew the trick that opened the little side door? Certainly no one from the farm itself, nor anyone from the village. He called his wife and a couple of neighbours to look at it. The placard told him nothing. Farmer Mueller, who lived next to Nadler, had been having trouble of the opposite kind with his eldest son, a group leader in the village under Harms's command: he had voted for Hitler; his father for Hindenburg. What motive could they have had when one was the same as the other?

The confusion in the village was reflected in the whirl of thoughts in Ziesen's head. Nadler was glad when they had to take a second poll. There was no need now to put up special posters at Ziesen's order. All parties had united to vote for Hitler. Ziesen was relieved and Nadler with him. The second election freed him from the necessity of exchanging his guiding star for another or of following him discontentedly. But, when in spite of this, Hitler failed again to win the election, Nadler felt himself bound to Ziesen anew by their common disappointment.

Nine

I

SHORTLY AFTER THIS, Ziesen was driving his car along the lake when it occurred to him to stop at the parsonage. The pastor was just looking out the window. Then he saw his guest, he called: 'Quick, Christian, put my shoelaces in my shoes.'

Christian dusted off the pair of boots the pastor had just taken off to have soled. From above the writing desk Dürer's portrait of Luther stared down with its usual sternness at his pastor's darned sock.

'At once, Herr Pastor,' replied Christian in the humble tone he assumed in the parsonage.

In the hallway he met Ziesen. 'Good evening,' he said, dropping his eyes, but not fast enough to prevent Ziesen from catching one of those sidelong glances Christian darted at people he would have hated had he not been so completely indifferent.

Ziesen had a vague impression of something annoying. In the study he said:

'Queer old codger, your shoemaker.'

'A poor devil,' replied the pastor. 'He hobbles through life. All these past years he has been helping his brother. Perhaps you could throw a little work his way; it's bad everywhere. Three forced sales on our shore. Wilhelm Nadler will have to come to it. And all the more as Christian's pension will be cut.'

'Lost a whole pile myself. Doesn't look as if it would be any better soon.' Ziesen talked about his bank crash, then of other disturbances. Behind the pastor's head, Luther listened on his wall to the problems of the living – problems he too had once known.

'It amuses me that Bruening is going to be put out now, after all. All that fuss he made about the old man was wasted. Old Hindenburg still has gumption enough not to feel under any obligation to that lickspittle – excuse the expression, Parson, it just slipped out. If only he'd put Hitler in Bruening's place! He is a Catholic too, of course. In Austria they're all said to be. But he's not a Papist.'

The Synod, the pastor revealed, held the opinion that Hitler was the only weapon for the Christian state. The two men discussed the times at some length and sipped their cherry schnapps. In spite of his wife's prohibition the pastor had opened the new bottle.

Christian Nadler was still on the way home when the motor overtook him. 'Poor devil,' thought the Baron. 'His bad leg makes every trip three times as bad for him; he'd get along much faster with a wooden one. But a man doesn't like to part with his legs.'

As soon as he was at home in his shack, Christian lighted his cast-iron stove. The weather was still fairly cold. It was too early to sit out under the porch roof. He pushed the three-legged stool to the open door, where he sat with one side of his body shivering and the other burning. With a sigh of content he looked out over the lake, over the endless flat land, as if the breadth of the earth were compensation for his own immobility. In the early spring light, the air was crystal clear. It was as if someone had removed a veil from the face of the world, so distinctly could he see the rippling water, the church tower of the distant village, the ploughshare on the opposite shore. White woolly clouds sailed across the sun, and light and shadow fell on his thin knotted hands as he stitched. They skimmed over his long face which in repose looked neither crafty nor hypocritical but quiet and grave. Christian was completely indifferent to individuals; he never felt any fondness for anyone. But the whole world which lay out there before his gaze – to that he was not indifferent. He could feel lonely in its separate parts: in taverns, in the village, on his brother's farm. In the world at large he felt perfectly at home.

He heard an engine roar over the water; one could see and hear everything here so much more plainly. A couple of men went off to work; one of them waved to him. The boat stopped on the shore at the next village. After some time had passed, a man – or rather a tall, loose-limbed young boy in a windbreaker – came swinging through the fields towards the shack. The sight of that figure with a blue scarf, sucking a straw between its teeth, amused Christian. But the boy now standing, looking down on him, meant nothing to him at all.

'Have you forgotten me, Christian? I'm Paul Strobel. A few years ago I worked for your brother by the day. You used to slip me something on the sly.'

'You've shot up like a weed. Want something to eat again?' Christian hobbled to his chest. He cut a piece of bread, and put a slab of ham on it. The boy sat down on the chest, just as in old days. And just as before he chattered away at a great rate. 'Did your dear brother, Wilhelm, guess who pasted Thaelmann on his barn doors? You've gone to seed a bit here these last years. You might manage to get yourselves a new storehouse.'

'Why we? I haven't anything to do with that business any more.'

'I'm on my way to the next village now. Farmer Haenisch is going to be sold out. Last week we stopped something like that. The sale has been postponed. We want to force the Nazis to make good the programme they're always boasting so much about - all that stuff about farmers and German socialism. Haenisch is a German farmer right enough.'

'Certainly,' said Christian, 'and Wilhelm too. And I'm a German shoemaker. The boots I have to sole are the boots of a German parson.'

The boy was now in full swing.

'We gave those clodhoppers in your villages a bellyful, even the Nazis.' He flung Christian a challenging glance. He kept irritating the man with his remarks about family and village government; from boyhood he had always been quarrelsome. He was always looking for someone to argue with. However, Christian refused to be drawn into any comments. The boy was a nuisance in his quiet workshop. All Christian would say was: 'Yes,' and 'Really?' till at last Paul gave up. Later as he trotted off across the fields, his scarf a blue flag in the spring sunlight, he ceased to be a disturbing intruder, becoming instead a little waving streak on the shore that Christian liked to see.

A few days later, for the first time, Christian sat out under the roof. It was pleasantly warm, save when a gust of wind drove a cloud across the sun, and a sudden shower drenched the countryside. If Christian sat sideways, he could keep his eye on the little point working round on the fields - his brother, his sister-in-law and the children. The middle boy had hair as yellow-white as raw silk; it had never darkened - a fact that angered his father when he thought of it. 'Like this I can keep an eye on him now and then,' thought Christian. In the last month he had refused to help his brother pay the taxes; giving as an excuse that his pension had been cut. Wilhelm was now so deeply in debt that it was only a question of time till he would be completely ruined.

The sun was in Christian's eyes. He turned the three-legged stool methodically and pounded away, one little nail after the other. What a fuss this Paul Strobel started up in a strange village, on a strange farm, just to prevent a forced sale. All human beings were always straining after something they didn't have.

Lightly, effortlessly, the wind tore away the bits of cloud over the lake; the sun was as hot as in summer; a steamer hooted. And slowly and gently, with no effort on anyone's part, Wilhelm's debts were piling up.

He had not heard the steps at his back. He was too lazy even to be startled. He merely raised his eyebrows as a voice called, 'Christian'. Because he did not turn, Liese was obliged to walk round in front of him. He looked up. Her freckles excited him: he was angry at his own restlessness.

'What do you want?' he said. His brother could see them both from the field. He had certainly watched her as she came here.

'Let's go inside so as I can sit down too,' she said. He answered her shortly:

'No.'

So she sat down on the boards. How angry he was at all the restlessness this woman brought with her. Liese went straight to the point. He had refused to lend his brother money the last time; now early this morning they had had the last warning from the bank. She didn't know where to turn. The same thing would happen to them as to Haenisch if he didn't come to their aid.

'But you know I've been cut too.'

'Nonsense!' said Liese. 'You have enough. You haven't touched a penny for years and years. You're earning money. When the farmers don't pay cash, they bring you bacon, and besides that, you've got your pension, cut or no cut. You haven't touched a penny for years. You've got it all tucked away in a sock or a bank. We have to make the payment this week. Then for a while we're over the worst. You've got to promise to pay in three instalments; then we'll have really turned the corner.'

He did not answer. At last he said:

'Wilhelm probably sent you on purpose for that; he's counting on getting something out of it.'

'Now you just listen to me! If we lose the farm, then it's gone. Have you thought that over?'

And still he did not say anything. His silence forced the woman to speak her mind. She began twisting a straw around her forefinger. She said calmly:

'Oh yes, you've probably thought it all out for yourself. I've thought a few things out too; I don't know whether it's what you've thought about or not. You have what you have; and what you don't have any more, you don't have. Have you thought about that too? You don't have any of it any more – the cow, the field, the house, in fact, everything will have to go under the hammer. You don't just have to sell it; you can also leave it to someone. It's true you can take something away from Wilhelm; and that won't worry you. But you can't take it away only from him, even if you want to; you'll be

taking it away from his children too. They'll have to go away themselves. They won't have a stick of their own any more; they'll have to go begging.'

Christian went on nailing the shoe the pastor had insisted upon having soled in a hurry. He hadn't even known that Liese could be so long-winded.

'I've told you twice already: I haven't anything.'

'But you have, you have,' said Liese. 'You've put something aside every month. You have almost twelve hundred.'

She had hit it so closely that unconsciously he caught himself wondering whether he had told her how much he had saved. He had understood too, the moment she mentioned 'leaving it' what she was hinting at. He had always imagined that when the family was in the gutter, he would whistle the boy over to himself, the little tousel-headed white poodle he loved so much. Then he would hand out money to him:

'Here, boy, this is just for you. Now stand on your own feet.'

Land would be the best, of course; the boy could do something with all the money, but nothing special. But his brother would leave the land to the children all together. He would give the best pieces to the eldest, and there would be nothing much left for the youngest. Christian would have to think of some way to turn all Wilhelm's debts to the advantage of the youngest boy. He had heard of lawyers in the city who handled tricky matters like that. Liese noticed that Christian was turning over something in his mind. She waited for him to speak, but he was too slow for her. She could not wait for him to come to the point. It was enough that she had given him something to worry about. She stood up:

'Think it over again.'

She trotted off to her husband.

'He hasn't said he'd do it yet. But he will.'

That had been Wilhelm's opinion all along. If anyone knew how to get round that slyboots, it was surely Liese, for Christian was wild about her. Wilhelm was fed up with the whole thing: asking and begging, hobbling around, borrowing money, sweating and talking. Only now it was different. Just a little while longer scrambling in the dark – then the light would go on. To him there were no two ways about it; this world was soon going to break up and a new one would emerge. As far as Wilhelm could envisage anything he hadn't actually seen with his own eyes, the new world would hold great power and splendour for him and for all who belonged to it. In the light of that power, useless care would vanish like chaff before the

wind. But today Wilhelm was worried. What was to become of him and his family if Liese was mistaken, if his brother would not come to his rescue again?

II

The wives of the unemployed dug out their wartime recipes. They ran into each other's kitchens, with old devices and new: what one could do with apple peelings, with the leaves of brussels sprouts, with the remnants of bread crumbs, even with coffee grounds. They had long ago learned from each other that the water in which potatoes were cooked could be used again for the soup made of dried peapods. Berlin might have been a besieged city in which people managed to keep alive on the most amazing concoctions. Marie was grieved when she cooked the roast of horse-meat on Sunday and her children cried:

'Hey! Gee up!'

Then one day Helene rushed into the room and shouted to her family:

'I've got work.'

Her parents and brothers stared at her exactly as she had thought on the way home they would. Never in her whole life had anyone ever admired Helene or seemed particularly glad to see her. Suddenly now every face turned toward her as if she had performed a miracle. Her father even pushed a chair forward for her and her mother gave her a plate. She began to talk, the words tumbling over themselves in her excitement. She had secretly done some sample work in an art embroidery shop; a girl she had met when she went to draw the dole had showed her several tricks, including the way to use a certain sort of needle with which you drew the threads together. This well-known and expensive shop in the West of the city wanted specimens of work from several dozen women. Her mother knew, of course, how clever she was with her hands. Now she was to start work tomorrow at eight o'clock. Eighteen marks a week to begin with. Her father said:

'No! The idea!'

Her mother said: 'Yes, you were always smart.'

They quickly filled the girl's soup plate. Helene felt that fate had at last repented of always giving her the short end of things. This, then, was her final reward for patiently bearing her ugly face, her lack of wit and gaiety, those drawbacks that had made her spend her whole life sitting silent in a corner. Now she was the only one in the

family – on the whole floor, in fact – who had a well-paid job. It was even more than a job; it was special work that not everyone could do; something that showed what she really was worth.

Her feelings of usefulness and pride increased when, the next morning, she ran to the subway station and travelled to the West. It is really amazing, she thought as she sat in the crowded compartment, that all these people are going to work. In my family I am the only one and in our house there are only a few. Late that afternoon when she came home they had cooked a meal specially for her as if she were the mother of the family. They besieged her with questions. She was to work on probation for a month, but there was no doubt that she would be equal to the test. She was even quicker than they had expected. A lady from the Kurfürstendamm had arrived in her car, weeping because she had burnt a cigarette hole in the new skirt of her tailored suit. She had offered the owner of the shop treble the price if she could repair it quickly while she waited. The lady waited nervously while Helene, encouraged by the shop owner, repaired the damage. The lady had worn a petticoat that was certainly more expensive than a ball gown. Helene was not at all surprised when this lady paid the amount of the unemployment insurance for her work in the darning frame. She was no more surprised than an astronomer is at the firmament from which he catches a little star in his telescope.

When the month was up, the whole family waited in tense anxiety. Then Helene came home and, without a word, put down a half-pound bag of coffee in front of her father – proof that her position was fully assured. Hans found a tablet of chocolate under his pillow. The sister slept on the oilcloth sofa in the kitchen; the little boy crept out to her, leant over the sofa edge and munched his chocolate. Helene did not smile, but she looked at him fondly as one watches a loved one enjoying a treat. She had not given her elder brother a present; Helene and Hans knew what bound them together. Even though he did not say anything, the boy understood the reason for the present. Because of her pale bony face, the dark over-large nostrils, Helene had been known among the boys in the house as the 'Death's Head', and to make her mad they drew a death's head everywhere she went. Once they grabbed her in the courtyard, held her head and smeared her face with chalk and carbon. Little Hans just happened to be coming across the yard from school. He was too small to jump at the tall rascals' throats, but he kicked them vigorously in the right places – whereupon they had dropped the girl like a shot.

Young Berger, who had taken Hans with him on Sunday to the 'pine-tree' country, had been coming frequently to the kitchen of late. Marie always kept coffee ready, no matter how strange and watered it might be. Big Franz glared suspiciously at the guest. He seldom met him, for he preferred to be out on his own business. Franz was in the habit of saying to his comrades: 'My old man - he's hopeless.' But at home he kept in the background and never offered his opinion. Marie guessed what sort of people Franz was running round with.

'How can you go any old place just to get more to eat than you do at home?' she asked.

'There's a lot of things you don't understand,' Franz replied. 'My own mother would have understood me better. If she were alive she would have known her boy wouldn't go there just for something to eat.'

'If your own mother were still alive,' said Marie, 'she would have boxed your ears for you. She was a good woman; and she would have hated this hangman.'

Franz looked at her with an expression of cold hatred in his eyes. Marie wondered sadly where she had failed with this boy. She had tried to be a mother to the two Geschke children. Not for anything in the world would she have acted like a stepmother. Franz stalked off in a rage banging the kitchen door behind him. Suddenly it seemed to Marie that the crash of the door he had slammed between himself and her would never die away. She had sewed and cooked for this boy as for her own; but she never had worried about him enough to give herself sleepless nights. And Geschke, his own father, was so exhausted by this continued unemployment which he could not understand, and which he felt was even a disgrace, that he paid little attention to the boy. Through these breaches in his parents' hearts the boy had slipped away from them.

The youngest, however, her Hans, must never slip away from her. Geschke scolded him as he did the big fellow because he ran away from the gloomy flat and hung about outside somewhere. Marie secretly slipped him the last groschen so that he would have enough money for the bus. He always came back happy and whatever had made him happy was probably worth while. She never could understand what he told her; now he would talk about a star, now about a fire, now about the Soviet Union, now about a girl named Emmi. 'He knows now where he belongs,' said Oskar the goggle-eyed who had taken him to the 'pine-tree' country, 'we've already taught him that.'

Marie did not understand exactly what that 'where he belonged' meant, or whether she herself belonged there as well as Geschke and the daughter, and perhaps her neighbour, perhaps Tante Emilie, too. Goggle-Eye once brought a newspaper and showed the little boy a picture.

'There, now you see where we belong. There, we all are.' He said to Marie as she bent over to look at the picture: 'That is the working class, Frau Geschke! Here is a representative from the Chinese and one from us and one from the coloured races and one from the Russians.'

At that moment Franz came into the room. He stopped short.

'What has that to do with Hans?' he said. 'We're living here in Germany.'

Then the two boys began to quarrel. Oskar called Franz an enemy of the working classes, whereupon Franz said that it was nonsense; there were no classes, only races, and he, Goggle-Eye, had thin blood in his veins because he was not conscious of his race. And Oskar the Goggle-Eye retorted: a coloured working man was closer kin to the German working man than Herr Siemens, for whom his father worked, even if Herr Siemens did happen to speak German. Frowning, Marie listened to the two boys. Was a coloured man as poor as she much nearer to her than any great gentleman who spoke German? Yes and no, no and yes. It was as hard for her to make her way through that labyrinth of strange thoughts as if the kitchen were a stone quarry.

Helene's arrival put an end to the quarrel. Oskar's elder brother, Heiner, had recently had his eye on her. He waited for her in the evening at her shop and brought her home. But he always let her go upstairs first and then followed a few minutes later. He was a silent fellow, somewhat sluggish. Helene was not by any means talkative herself; the family was taken aback when she suddenly laughed out loud at table in Heiner's presence. She had never had a sweetheart; that Heiner should suddenly take a fancy to her she ascribed to the same fate that had chosen her as the only one in the family to get a job. Marie was very happy: a girl needed love; even Geschke seemed to have a better opinion of this strange young man. The only thing he had had against him was that he egged on the little boy. He had been annoyed at his visit.

Marie was glad, too, that this Heiner now sometimes took Helene with him on Sundays so that she could keep an eye on the little boy on the journey. This she did less actively than Marie had hoped. Scarcely had they reached the Youth Colony when the two

lovers wandered off away from the others. Helene thought that with her uselessness she had also cast aside her ugliness; she was no longer ashamed of her huge nostrils, which seemed less noticeable nowadays. She learned to swim in the lake – a thing she would never have dreamed of doing. Proudly she stretched her young body, that was usually hidden in mended, faded clothes. At home her ugly face had always been the thing that mattered; here her young breasts, her straight upright carriage, counted. She became calm and happy. An old man often came to the holiday camp; the children carried his books for him. He sat down on a stone in the midst of them, read aloud and talked to them. Helene, it appeared, could remember difficult words better than any of them and could follow abstruse reasoning. The old man's clear glance rested in amazement on the girl; he had waited a long time for just such a pupil, as the girl had for this teacher. Up to now she had always known that she could sew well, better than most women. Now she was suddenly able to explain strange ideas which no one grasped as quickly as she.

Hans ran to his sister when he tore his trousers or when he needed her help in any other way. It did not take the children long to discover that she was a good person to turn to when they were in trouble. Certain individuals, within a large group, always gather smaller groups around them. So here, too, various small groups began to form around individual men. A few crowded round the old teacher who explained his books; a few round the dried-up old man who knew everything about the stars. Particularly devoted to him was the little hunchbacked boy whose father was a second-hand dealer, a man Hans would not like to have had as father. But he was glad to have the boy as a friend: at night, with his head thrown back and his soft, shortsighted eyes fixed on the heavens, the little hunchback could tell the names of the stars even over the Belle Alliance Platz. There was a group of children who liked to crowd round an impudent fellow who had had many adventures. There were always many women and girls and children round Helene, for she was ready to give advice on any subject: the colour of clothes, the old teacher's explanations, a cooking recipe. Helene was happy the moment she started for the station. For her the new longed-for era began each week when they had left the city behind. Then the old spoiled world in which she had been an ugly, ignorant girl fell away. In the world which was now beginning not only were the last the first, but the ignorant became wise and the ugly, beautiful.

As his sister Helene always paired off with Heiner, Hans almost always joined little, short-haired Emmi. Emmi looked like a boy.

She lived at the other end of Berlin and she never came to Hans's house. But he knew that she would be standing on the road watching for him. She waited as women wait.

From the beginning Martin made it clear to the boy that he would soon have to go away. As the boy barely answered, he thought his departure did not mean much to the child. It was true that Hans gave little thought to Martin nowadays. He was so strongly and so firmly entrenched in his group that only occasionally now, when he had nothing else to do, did he ride out to the Alexandrinenstrasse.

He was not, therefore, greatly surprised when one day Martin told him to carry his bag to the station. The man was distressed because the boy seemed quite indifferent to his departure. He comforted himself with the thought that he was leaving some mark in his life, even if the boy should forget who had left the mark. When they arrived at the station, he said:

'You must be strong, no matter what happens to you.'

Hans asked: 'When are you coming back, today or tomorrow?'

'I told you long ago that I am not coming back any more.'

Hans turned his head away from a rail he had been watching intently. He raised his eyes and looked straight into Martin's eyes in the way grown-ups never can. His face looked pointed and angry. The tiny little flecks that sometimes darted from his pupils flashed and blazed. His eyes were cold; he bared his teeth. Martin was afraid to look too long in the boy's eyes; he lowered his glance.

'Weeks ago I told you I was going away,' he said. 'Only yesterday I told you that I was going today.'

'No.'

'What's the matter with you. I told you again and again that I had to go away soon.'

'You never told me that you would go away for ever, far away, without me.'

'Oh, come now, it was quite clear that I had to go without you. I certainly can't take you with me.'

'Why not?'

Martin gave his reasons and the boy listened in gloomy silence. The more carefully he tried to explain, the more futile his explanations sounded. Hans finally lowered his eyes as if he had had enough of staring into the man's eyes that were so hard to read.

The conductor shouted: 'All aboard.'

'Behave yourself now, you hear?'

Hans said: 'All right.'

He did not even wait till the train pulled out. He strolled out of

the station whistling. To look back or even to wave seemed useless. To Hans a heart had always been something people sang songs about, or neighbours talked about in their gossiping. Now he could easily touch his with his fingers; the man had hurt it. He had been so good to him before that the boy had grown deeply fond of him. Of late he had not run to him so often as in the early days. He had not needed him so much. It had been more fun, too, to sit round the campfire with the boys than indoors with the lonely, silent man. But all good things had come to him at this man's nod; new friends, songs, the cinema, even the stars. They would all remain. But the man – the man was gone. In spite of everything, he had not kept faith. He had not loved Hans so very much or he would not have left him alone. But he, Hans, had loved the man as he had never loved anyone before or since. His mother was like the snow or the sun: she was just there.

Hans lingered in town till it was late. The whole city seemed empty to him; the crowded streets, the alluring cinemas, empty, lonely. What was to become of him now?

III

One evening Lieven ran into an old friend just as the latter was about to get into a taxi. When he saw Lieven, he took his foot off the running-board.

Wenzlow could never get used to having enough money in his pocket to reach his aunt's house punctually. When he glanced at the clock and saw how late it was, he jumped up in alarm. Then it occurred to him that after all, with the advance on his travel money in his brief-case, it did not matter how much he spent on taxis for the short time he would be in Berlin. Tonight, however, he had been late in leaving. It was so long since he had seen Lieven that at first glance he did not recognize the slender, fair-haired man in the dark suit. But that handsome, clean-shaven face, with the somewhat prominent cheekbones; the soft, rather hoarse accent of the first words reminded him of a Lieven he had known in the old days. Both men had the feeling common to all when one unexpectedly runs into an old friend from the past. How fast time flies! How young they had been in those days. But we are still young, after all. What was there about that fresh, untried youth of ours? And what about the youthful charm of this man who suddenly stands before me? 'He has changed as much as I have,' thought Wenzlow. But why had he not recognized Lieven at once? He wore civilian clothes

instead of uniform. The uniform was so much a part of Lieven that Wenzlow could hardly imagine him without his insignia. On second glance Wenzlow discovered – and said so aloud – that Lieven had changed astonishingly little. The expression of his slanting grey eyes was as imperturbable and ironical as ever. His teeth, a little too small and too white, were like a mouse's teeth in the bold, handsome mouth. Wenzlow remembered having thought something of the kind before. Lieven carried a brief-case under his arm. He must, Wenzlow thought, be holding down a special job somewhere. 'Oh, no, not at all,' Lieven replied to his question, 'I am in the Heims Bank.'

They decided to celebrate their meeting in the nearest bar. But as they entered each thought simultaneously: 'I shouldn't have been in such a hurry to invite him.' There is some unpleasant memory between us, something embarrassing we must be careful not to mention. They were seated at the table before it occurred to them both at the same moment what that embarrassing matter was – the divorce of Wenzlow's sister! Lieven had heard long ago that Klemm and his chauffeur had been killed somewhere in an accident. The tragedy could not have touched him less. Ordinarily he would not have paid the slightest attention to gossip. Because it was his principle never to revive past loves and because he had almost forgotten Lenore, they did not touch on the subject Wenzlow dreaded. Wenzlow decided that Lieven knew nothing about the divorce. He thought: 'My poor sister has lost her desire for adventure, living with Tante Amalie. No wonder she once fell for this man; he's a good-looking devil.'

'So you're still in the army, I see,' Lieven was saying, 'at least if one can call your *Verein* by that name.' There was a trace of mockery on his calm handsome face, though he lowered his eyelids – an expression habitual to him. Wenzlow recalled his own reluctance to express either disparagement or enthusiasm in Lieven's presence. He began to talk about his approaching journey. Lieven replied:

'I can't understand why you go to the Chinese. Why don't you have patience and wait till men like you are in the saddle here at home?'

Those long supple hands, those astonishingly long, thick eyelashes on the lowered eyelids, even the way Lieven filled both glasses, irritated Wenzlow for reasons he could not explain. To himself he thought: 'I had better not tell Lenore anything about this meeting.' The orchestra began to play for dancing. The first

couples pushed between the tables. The room was thick with smoke under which sparkled glasses, teeth, and the necklaces around women's necks. Out in the street one could see the noses flattened against the huge window-panes and the eyes staring in with curiosity and astonishment.

Wenzlow said: 'That's why I'm going out to China - to go where I am needed.'

Lieven said: 'Every one of us is needed everywhere - here most of all. You don't have to go outside Germany to find a place where we are needed.'

There was now no trace of mockery on his face; he looked straight at Wenzlow.

'We need even the humblest now. We need everyone; we need children; we need those people out there . . .' He pointed to the noses flattened against the window-pane:

'We need the farmers in their fields; we need you and me.'

Almost unconsciously he repeated the words his cousin Otto Lieven had used when he himself was looking for a job outside Germany. Wenzlow was deeply stirred by Lieven's words - he himself had been wondering for a long time whether he could ever, through his own efforts, make anything out of this empty, inert life of today. He knew at once, from his tone, to what efforts, what party and what future Lieven was referring. He thought: 'So they've landed him too!' He himself longed to be free of the ties that bound him to a certain circumscribed spot on the globe and would continue to bind him even though he travelled far away and left his doubts behind him. Though Hitler's name was not mentioned in their conversation, Wenzlow was at first depressed, then excited and attracted by the prospect Lieven offered. He felt a ruthlessness and daring he had never known in his whole life; pure values that should stand his country in good stead: and he was tempted. Lieven did not want to spoil their meeting. He laid his hand on Wenzlow's: 'In any case, the footholds you make for us out there will be useful.'

'I have to go to my family now,' said Wenzlow and added quickly, to avoid bringing his sister Lenore into the conversation: 'My wife does not want to miss a minute of our time together before I leave. She will stay here for a while with our children. I promised to spend the evening with the family.'

'Oh, yes! In Potsdam. Where you and I went to visit your aunt,' Lieven remembered. 'I even slept under your roof. You came into my room one night and sat on my bed. You were upset over something or other. What was it? Oh, yes, I remember! Because they had

dug up someone in the Grönwald. It was all in the papers. And because you had shot a boy a few days before, at the same spot.

'And you and Klemm,' said Wenzlow quickly, 'and the fellow who shoved the boy into the car and out of the car into the woods. Now it comes back to me - we had changed cars.'

Though he never thought about that incident any more, the feeling of discomfort he had experienced the moment he saw Lieven came back; a vague feeling that Lieven had somehow always been superior to him; a clever, fascinating man with whom you had to be on your guard. Lieven went on:

'We are older now, unfortunately; things like that don't get on one's nerves any more. Is the old lady still alive?'

'Tante Amalie? I should say so! Funny for you to ask if she is still alive. How could Tante Amalie ever die?'

When Wenzlow left, Lieven still sat on at the table. He looked at the women, thin-skinned in their heavy furs. Passionately he wished he could throw everything overboard and go away somewhere like Wenzlow. He wanted to go abroad; to carry out the plans he had just been scoffing at. Fate had played him a dirty trick to have provided Wenzlow with such a goal and such a journey. Wenzlow was a decent average chap who wanted security and the approbation of his superior officers, of his wife, possibly even of that bony Tante Amalie who still clung so tenaciously to life. Even in the Far East, just as here at home, he would see in the most dangerous situation only a chance for praise and promotion instead of pleasure and excitement.

But he, Lieven, never felt really alive till he was living dangerously, balancing on that thin borderline between life and death which little men avoid in despair. He felt almost dizzy in the ordinary round of daily life, like a rope dancer who feels safe on his rope and unsafe on the flat earth. Of course, he was glad that he now lived in a decent room on the Kaiserdamm instead of in the back room in Steglitz; that he did not have to smoke and gossip the evenings away with little Luetgens. Out there where Wenzlow was going, however, the ground was surer than here. This café in which he now sat, with its yellow rugs, its music, its hovering waiters, its bored dancing couples, also lay on the safe, flat earth.

'You must train yourself to be patient,' his new friend Weidel had assured him. 'We have to wait till more men join us in the old familiar march tempo; then we will play a different tune.'

He thought: 'Wenzlow is now sitting with his family in his living-room: perhaps he is already in bed. To tear oneself loose from home

one must first have a home; to part from a family one must first have one.'

IV

Malzahn sat one morning opposite his old friend, Spranger, in the latter's study. The lines of cunning and irony that had always played round the corners of Spranger's mouth had become deeply etched in. In the past years one difficult lawsuit after the other had carved out his appearance and his fortune. His regular features, the narrow nose and Vandyke beard were as characteristic of a certain type of judge as a certain tree is of a certain landscape. There was not a famous lawsuit, whether against the murderer of Feme or against Karl von Ossietzky, in which Spranger's face had not appeared. The public had become as accustomed to seeing him as one is to the appearance of certain generals, ministers and beautiful women at social functions. Those lines of irony and cunning that had gradually deepened on his face gave him an expression of controlled cruelty.

'You are a famous man,' said Malzahn. 'I am what I was - a retired major.'

'Then you should do me a favour,' said Spranger, laughing. 'Take advice gratis for which my clients pay large sums. Once you have taken it you can give up worrying.'

'I don't worry any more. But it is a serious matter for us that at this very moment Wenzlow should be going far away for heaven knows how long.'

'The boy - you must allow me to continue to call him a boy even if he is your son-in-law and has three children. To me he is and always will be the serious young boy who used to sit here and worry over problems of conscience. Remember the Kapp time? We almost had to tie him down to keep him from running to the Brandenburg Tor and welcoming Kapp in uniform. Why do you say "this very moment"? This is just the moment to take this appointment as a gift from heaven. Chiang Kai-shek, or whatever his name is - the yellow Duce - has recently had a sign from heaven . . . from the Western heaven naturally . . . that he should engage Seeckt and the whole crowd to set his army in order and at the same time put an end to the Reds. A sign that is of great importance to our boy considering his particular case and the conditions of things in the world. Imagine what would happen if the Soviet Union should win over another Red adherent out there. We would then have nearly seven hundred million Bolsheviks in the world. We

Germans are only a modest sixty million! Just think what that would mean! Of course, it would still be a long way from the world revolution of which old Lenin dreamt. But an unpleasant neighbour for us, all the same. For Asia is a pretty morsel. That Chinese Duce is no fool. And no one – no one can set things in order like our officers who know their job. So much for world order. Now the family. I have just reminded you how excited the boy was in the Kapp days. But, my dear friend, we are now living in days just like them. Only the signs are reversed: the old apple-cart is going to be upset at last!’

‘If you’re so certain it’s going to be upset, why are you so set on his going away?’

‘It’s some way ahead still. Once we have the Reich again and the army, then the boy can come quietly back home. But it doesn’t look like being yet awhile. We have been fortunate in showing the public three miracle-workers in succession. Each one has shown what he can do: bows to right and to left. On the one hand relief for the East to keep the Baltic barons quiet, and relief for the hungry people here at home. They have cleaned out the Prussian stables, but, however much they may be champing at the bit, they haven’t given the new horses their heads. At first everyone said: Yes, S.A. – well and good! The people’s desire for military preparedness and so forth. But suppose the S.A. should get too strong for the Reichswehr? What if there should be trouble? I have a fairly good idea of what that means nationally, but what it means to the nation, frankly, I’ve no notion. What if there should be two military groups instead of one? I think our boy might object if he were suddenly ordered to fire on the S.A., the military group chosen by the nation! And to refuse to fire – to break ranks and go over to the other side – is not a pleasant thing to do. He belongs to his own people, you see. That time before, in this very room, we managed to keep him away from the Brandenburg Tor: now we are keeping him in China away from all this mess.’

‘Then how do you think it will end?’ Malzahn asked again.

At that moment Frau Spranger came into the room. She was still a beautiful woman with her white hair and her oval face. The legends of her youthful beauty were now warnings of the transitoriness of all things mortal. Powder covered her eyelids and her bluish veins like hoarfrost. She laughed and smiled more frequently than before because that brought out her dimples instead of the hollows in her network of wrinkles. Malzahn jumped up briskly. He kissed her hand.

While his wife was arranging the tray with the old dust-covered

bottle of cognac and two extra glasses, Spranger answered his friend's question:

'I have taught myself not to believe anything any more. Of the three cardinal virtues – faith, charity, and hope – I have dropped the first two: hope alone remains. I can only hope. I hope for a man strong enough to master the witches' cauldron that holds what we call our nation in its thrall: that dark, viscous mass of human beings overflowing our streets. That mass either thins out as the result of some law chemistry has not yet discovered or coagulates in dangerous clots. Bruening could not find the way, nor could Papen for all his cleverness and good manners. And Schleicher, I fear, will not be able to do the trick either. It's quite possible this fellow Hitler may really bring it off: he knows how it looks down there because he came from the gutter. He is said to be a narrow-minded, hysterical philistine, but he is supposed to have a couple of *idées fixes* that suit our book to perfection. After all, if someone gives me gold or silver I can use, what do I care whether it was discovered by a divining rod or by a geologist. As far as I am concerned he can go on rolling his eyes and shouting hysterically and shaking his forelock. I don't want him to marry my daughter – she has had her embassy attaché for some time. In my modest opinion we ought to give the man a few years' run and money enough to keep him going. But the people on whom that depends must first learn to see things that way. In short, I find the offer that takes your son-in-law abroad for a while an extremely fortuitous circumstance. By the time he comes back everything will be straightened out in Germany. We'll know whom we're shooting at.'

'Just another little glass, dear Major?' asked Frau Spranger. 'You know my husband won't allow the old bottles to be dusted. He calls it patina: I call it dirt.'

Ten

I

TANTE AMELIE waited in the bay-window till the postman came along the Scharnhorststrasse. Nor did she move when her niece Lenore ran down the steps. She heard the garden gate bang, then the outcries of delight or disappointment depending upon whether Wenzlow had written to his young wife next door or to her,

the only mother he had ever known. If the letter bore her name, she would lock herself in the covered balcony to read it – though the multicoloured panes were hard on her bad eyes. That handwriting, as upright as the man himself, was the best, perhaps the only gift the months brought her. Sitting here on her balcony she was linked with an inconceivable point at the other end of the earth where part of her own flesh and blood, her own substance, was needed. When she had finished her first hasty skimming, she would call Lenore and ask her to read the letter aloud.

‘Dear Tante Amalie: If you look on the map of the General Staff you can find my headquarters. I am living here with my friend, Boland, of whom I have already told you, and with our interpreter, a fellow named Hansin Liau. I have spoken of him before in my letters. He is the same man who was attached to me on my arrival. Though Boland too urges the necessity of non-fraternization which our German officers advise, I look upon this man almost as a comrade – at least in so far as that is possible with a man of the yellow race. He went to a military school abroad, knows English as well as I do and even a little German. He has none of the defects of the natives hereabouts. His manners are excellent and on all our trips he takes great pains to call our attention to the beauties of his country and to explain its peculiarities.

‘As to landscape and objects of art, this country is wonderful. Apart from that you find here a widespread poverty far worse than anything you, dear Tante Amalie, can see in the north and east of Berlin. A meal the unemployed at home complain about would last a whole family here for a week. This race is accustomed to rags and poverty and hunger, to fatal diseases and even to death – and this is something very hard for Europeans to understand.

‘Dear Tante Amalie, I have not written for so long because I have been extremely busy. You can’t imagine how difficult it is to make soldiers out of such poor human material. General Chiang Kai-shek knew what he was about when he chose us Germans for this job. Only we, with the experiences we have gained in war and peace, could drill these people, who have not the faintest idea what punctuality means. Even so it sometimes happens that just when we think they are trained they run over to the opposite side. You people at home can have no idea of their unreliability. Obedience and discipline are just so many empty phrases to these coolies. They are swayed solely by their emotions. We have to be constantly on the alert to keep the native population from being won over by Red propaganda. Just as at home there are Red centres in all our large

cities, so here in this gigantic land there are entire Red provinces. The estate where we are quartered lies close to the border of a Red province. That is why we have built fortifications and military roads for the use of our motorized troops. It sounds simple enough in writing. You would naturally suppose that these people in rags and tatters would not have weapons to use against us – certainly not in quantities that might prove serious. The truth is, however, that many of the men in the village near us simply move south to join the Reds before we can fence them in. There is no doubt that many who failed to get away fast enough are still in hiding. We have searched the whole region for them. They will get short shrift. Even death, as I told you, is not as important in this land as it is with us, and their presence endangers our movements into the Red territory. As a rule these fellows keep busy at quite harmless occupations and then, suddenly, when the army draws near, they form together in dangerous bands. Imagine, dear Tante Amalie, our gardener or our postman at home suddenly turning out to be a guerrilla. That's just the way the Division's staff was cold-bloodedly murdered not so long ago.

'For some time feelings here have been tense because the Japanese have occupied Shanghai, and in the north the ancient empire of Manchukuo has separated from China. The people here hate foreigners and they cannot realize that the enemy, as they now call Japan, is superior to them in many ways, which is the reason for their present success. In my opinion instead of stirring up this hatred it would be better to persuade the population to submit and to recognize that the enemy is superior. However, the majority, including my interpreter, would consider that an insult.

'He has just come in. I must close. We have promised to teach him *skat*. He is such a modest, tactful fellow, I am really sorry about the non-fraternization order. Even you, dear Tante, would forget his yellow skin if you could see the way this man conducts himself. He has a dash and, above all, a patriotism that would do honour to another Fatherland.'

'I'd really like to know this Chinese Hans or whatever his name is,' said Tante Amalie.

'We must look him up on the picture Fritz sent Ilse,' said Lenore.

Tante Amalie repressed a pang of jealousy she never failed to experience whenever a letter or a message from Wenzlow went next door. All her trust and hope – her whole life, in fact – was

wrapped up in her nephew and she hated to be deprived of the smallest share in him.

It was their custom to exchange letters between the two houses, but it took Tante Amalie hours, even days, before she could bring herself to send her own letters next door. She resented the good fortune of her neighbours: even the sound of the two little girls, Wenzlow's daughters, laughing in the adjoining garden, seemed to her an impertinence. She preferred the eldest, Anneliese – a surly, homely, even boyish girl – to the younger Marianne, who was much admired by her family for her gaiety and charm. As to her nephew's son, whom she considered her first grandson, she would have liked nothing better than to move his cradle from the adjoining house to her own balcony.

Every time a letter arrived, Lenore Klemm felt that the vastness of the world was no concern of hers. And this interpreter her brother praised seemed to her incredibly strange – a man with all the qualities of the men in the innumerable books she read in the privacy of her girlhood's room. Her son Helmut was unhappy and oppressed between his reading mother and his day-dreaming old aunt. He, for one, saw absolutely no reason to renounce the vastness of the world. He intended to enjoy it all himself some day and he was already doing so in anticipation. The world came to him, here in his home. He loved that uncle he scarcely knew, simply because he was far away in a strange and fascinating country and because his letters broke the monotony of family life.

In his starved young life there were two props to which young Klemm held fast: his dead father as he knew him from descriptions and a few memories of his own; and his uncle, Fritz Wenzlow, who was far away but for all that someone to wait for and to emulate. If Helmut was lucky, he listened at home when his mother read the letters aloud: otherwise he heard them next door when they were read to the Malzahns and their guests, elderly retired officers and others still in the service who met there regularly. Helmut had a third prop, but one so distant it could only be a guiding star – Hitler. He hid Hitler's picture under his mattress, sharing his secret only with his teacher. The latter fastened his picture of Hitler to the inside of the classroom cupboard, safely out of the inspector's sight lest the Weimar Republic dismiss him. Helmut's young cousins in Elteville were better off. In their bedroom there were all sorts of pictures of Adolf Hitler, not only from newspaper clippings pinned up with drawing-pins but beautiful shiny photographs in real frames. Their father passed over his guests' sarcastic remarks with

a jest. For to private and official guests alike, it was an open secret that here was a group of highly respectable people who did not speak of the Party with the scorn and distrust general among the aristocracy.

Here, however, in the house in Potsdam, there was no photograph of a Fuehrer hanging openly on the walls for a boy to look at. Like a star high above the world and men, Helmut felt closer to his dead father than to the living who were so far removed from him in thoughts and outlook on life. Aunts and old maids never raised their eyes so high. They scolded when he wanted to go with his teacher to a meeting of the Hitler Youth or on one of their outings. They opposed the boy's impulse to break down the barriers that separated him from other boys, the youth of his country. They objected to his marching under the command of boys who did not belong to good families, but were the sons of butchers or postmen or working men. The uncle in Elteville would not allow his sons to accept any privileges: Tante Amalie called that a disparagement of God-given rights, all too common now in certain parts of Germany. She even said angrily that it was a last vestige of the French Revolution that had not yet been uprooted on the Rhine. In his uncle's house they kept saying that only National Socialism could get rid of this monster.

Sometimes Helmut ran off by himself. When he felt he could not stand it any longer he would go rowing on the Jungfernsee where his school friend waited for him in his boat. They would glide through the reeds, talking frankly to each other, unburdening themselves or just lie there in the boat, each dreaming his own dreams. What was Germany? The only country in the world that embodied in its soil and in its blood and in its language everything Helmut held dear: his mother's calm beautiful face, his father's grave, the teacher he worshipped, the Jungfernsee with its reeds and its birds and its solitude unbroken save for the quiet dip of their oars. Germany meant to him the valorous deeds of bygone days, the clouds of dead leaves in the fall, snow falling in winter, golden corn swaying in the wind in summer and tiny buds lifting their heads almost out of the snow in spring. Above all, it meant beauty which his school friend could not even imagine because he had only been to Berlin and the Baltic, whereas Helmut went to the Rhine for all his holidays. The boys would have fought shy of calling anything great and sacred that did not strike them as worthy. But there could be no objection on that score to his father's charm, his mother's beautiful face, the yellow corn and the quiet lake. Unthinkingly they absorbed the

things their teachers commended and that had touched their imaginations. Hitler, whom many ridiculed, and hated, would make of this Germany which held all they loved a mighty land which all nations who worshipped the same things would revere. Those nations that did not understand the things the boys held to be great and sacred would have to bow the knee before them. Hitler would lead them out of their straits. Hitler promised them power and victory and they believed in his promises. Power over what? Victory over what? Those questions did not disturb them.

They were so well hidden in the reeds no one could find them. They pulled into the cove they had chosen for their private sessions. Two birds flew up in fright and the boys laughed. They sang a couple of songs they had been forbidden to sing in the streets. They also sang their own favourite songs which they were too shy to sing before the class: old folk-songs of death and love, two events of which they had no knowledge. They felt vaguely from the rhythm of the music and the melancholy tunes that love and death were somehow akin. What attracted them was the forbidden and the unknown, along with this hiding in the reeds and the smell of the water. They tied their boat to a post and went home in silence, prepared for a scolding because they were late. They were exhausted from the excitement of their friendly alliance and the emotions of the day.

II

In all the years Christian had lived in his brother's old boat-house he had never gone farther afield than to his customers in the village or to church. He had never had either occasion or desire to go to the next village, still less to the city. He worked away under his roof, looking out at the water that reflected villages on the other shore, fields, the gleaming points of ploughs and hoes, and the mysterious flight of clouds. He was glad to sit apart, forgotten and unknown, anchored to the land and to his brother's family. He chuckled over the promissory notes. Wilhelm, however, did not worry about his debts; nor did he buckle down to work as the situation demanded. He merely kept on saying that everything would turn out all right now. The moment Group Leader Harms sent for him he would leave the most urgent task and hurry off. The farmers who sometimes dropped in at Christian's workshop were angry with his brother. Wilhelm gave them sharp answers, stirred up their own sons against them, and dashed about the country in trucks like a

maniac. Harms, who had never had a good name in his own village, was becoming a man of importance in a number of others. The boys stood to attention before him.

Christian had kept aloof from such complaints. People liked him and talked freely with him because he did not bother them with his own observations.

A number of thoughts rose in Christian's mind. In case things should go wrong with his brother, he must make sure that he would get his own share. Wilhelm was mixed up again in all sorts of queer doings: he might easily be killed. Then all Christian would get would be a miserable settlement from the debt-ridden estate. For himself he needed no more than his three-legged stool under the porch roof. He had his share only in dreams, and that he would still have even after his brother's death.

He heard the farmers talking about a lawyer in the Kantstrasse in Berlin who could straighten out the trickiest matters. Out of all those promissory notes a man like that could certainly make some sort of legal paper that would give him an inheritance the government could not touch. He rolled down the shutters and locked up his shop. The path through the woods to the railway station was too far for him. When one of the road-workers came in to have his heels nailed on, Christian told him to send for Paul Strobel, the boy who had once worked on his brother's farm and who only last year had unexpectedly dropped in to see the shoemaker. As Paul was out of work and had time on his hands, he rowed Christian across the lake to the railway station on the opposite shore.

Although Christian seldom went anywhere, he was sly and shrewd when it came to important deals. He knew almost nothing about Berlin but he was not in the least impressed. If he was sick and tired of the village, its gossip and its goings-on, he was equally indifferent to the vast city. His main thought was to get as quickly as possible to the only house that meant anything to him in that gigantic pile. A bus took him to the Kantstrasse. From all he saw and heard on the way he deduced that Wilhelm must have picked the right card this time: there were swastikas everywhere. 'They'll soon be sticking one on the big Reichs flag,' he thought: 'I must put my business in order as fast as I can.'

The lawyer was small and fat, with little pig eyes, and he wore a gold watch-chain. As Christian gave him a sudden sharp glance, he buried his nose in the papers. What sort of a fellow is this? he thought. Christian Nadler did not seem to be a real farmer. Nor was he embarrassed before officials.

Christian explained what had brought him here. He had been lending money to his brother for fourteen years – every penny he had been able to scrape together. Did he have written proof of that? For the law, you understand, Herr Nadler, recognizes only what is in black and white. The little lawyer had often seen his clients come to grief because they had depended on loyalty and trust instead of on signatures. However, this strange fellow was obviously not one of that sort.

‘Certainly, Herr Anwalt. Here it all is, in black and white.’ He spread out the documents before him. With the passage of time, the notes had become a bundle as big as the files of a minister.

‘I’d just like you to put it all together and then I want to know what I can count on, and how it can be passed on to my heirs. And suppose I’m dead and my brother Wilhelm is dead too, how can the heir collect it?’

The lawyer had tackled so many extraordinary legal titles in his day that he was never surprised at anything. A few adroit questions brought to light the difficulty about the inheritance. Why be surprised at the existence of a son born out of wedlock at the end of the World War, whose legal father had never denied his parentage? Now was there anything surprising in trying to protect that son’s interests if he was not to inherit from the legal father. Christian liked the lawyer better now than at first. A man could talk plainly and openly here: you needn’t hold back any more than in a doctor’s consulting-room. The lawyer promised first to determine his legal titles and secondly to safeguard them. He would send all papers to him by registered post. As he was leaving, Christian asked: ‘Herr Anwalt, if a new government should come in now with this Adolf Hitler, would all this still be legal?’

‘My dear Herr Nadler,’ cried the lawyer. ‘Government is always government. Law is law; property is property. There’s a lot of talk now of abolishing the Roman Law – there are supposed to be a couple of new German laws. In my opinion the basic principles of our society, the right of possession and property, will not be infringed upon. At the most they will just confiscate the fortunes of a few Jews. You’re not a Jew, are you, Herr Nadler?’

‘God forbid, Herr Anwalt,’ Christian replied, using the same tone and raising his eyes to the ceiling as he did at the parsonage.

‘And perhaps the fortunes of some of the enemies of the government. But you are not that either, Herr Nadler?’

‘God forbid, Herr Anwalt.’

Despite his visit to the lawyer, Christian had never seriously considered that anything could change his ordinary round of life, and certainly he did not envisage his own death – nor for that matter his brother's. He could not imagine what his brother's eldest son, a big, strapping fellow, would do when he was obliged to give up a piece of his inheritance to his younger brother, the Egghead. Why should something unusual like death come between his brother Wilhelm and Christian himself? Particularly as one of them had enough to do soling shoes year in and year out, and the other ploughing, sowing and threshing?

A few days after the visit to the lawyer, fate showed Christian how wise he had been to make these arrangements. One evening the Nadler daughter, Anni, a thickset, backward girl, of whom it was said in school, 'She's the kind you can depend on,' came at an unusual hour out from the village to the boathouse. She waited quietly till Christian opened the door for her: then she said:

'We've had a little accident at our house, Uncle Christian. Father is dying.'

That morning, on an order from Harms, Wilhelm Nadler had gathered the S.A. boys of the village together. They had marched towards Werder where five trucks waited for them. Harms had already filled two of the trucks with his own men: Wilhelm was proud because he had been the promptest at carrying out Harms's order. The boys from the next village did not arrive till much later. He could tell that Harms considered him, Wilhelm, prompt and dependable. It was a far cry from the day when Wilhelm had thought of Harms as a debt-ridden ne'er-do-well. Now he was a man with the God-given power to determine who was prompt and who dependable – a man who, because of that power, was master over any number of villages, owner of men and fields and cows, not merely of a few enlisted S.A. youths. For Harms need only snap his finger and trucks and motor cycles were on hand, not to mention uniforms and flags and guns. Ever since the armistice Wilhelm had longed constantly for his gun. Whether a man was loading grain or painting the trunks of fruit trees with lime, a gun was the only thing that gave him power, unlimited godlike power over life and death. His Hauptmann Degenhardt had given him a taste of that power once, but, after the collapse of the Kapp Putsch, the Hauptmann had disappeared and the power with him. For a long time Freiherr von Ziesen across the lake had attracted him with a show of power. But it was only a show. This Harms, who had certainly not looked

like much in his old working sinock, was the only one who had delivered the goods.

The trucks drove to Oberschoeneweide, where a general fight had broken out. Behind Oberschoeneweide lay a little hamlet built around a factory. It was part factory settlement, part village. The settlement had revolted and refused to let any S.A. men through. Police from Berlin swept the alleys clean. They halted Harms' car – the first in line – and ordered him to make a detour round the village. Harms laughed at them. He gave the chauffeur an order. The latter stepped on the gas and dashed ahead full speed, the rest of the trucks behind him – *crash! bang!* – through the entire village. The workers had stretched a wire straight across the main street and the whole column came to an abrupt halt. Someone shouted from a window:

'Just look at that! There's Nadler!'

'Hi, there! It's going to rain! Your hay'll get wet! Better go back home!'

Wilhelm Nadler flew into a rage. The window was dark. He could not recognize the hateful face and he fired at random into the darkened window. At that the S.A. jumped from the trucks. They cut the wire – and with it everything that separated one crowd from the other, one man from other men and life from death. Windows crashed, doors were broken in. As he collapsed Wilhelm Nadler thought the gunshots sounded hushed, the crunch of his bootleg enormously loud.

They took him to the hospital in the village and bandaged his leg, Anni told Christian in her slow, emphatic way, and later in the day brought him home. Whether he would live was in God's hands. The police had arrested a number of people in Oberschoeneweide and in the factory settlement because they had shot at the trucks from the windows.

Christian showed neither grief nor indignation. While his brother's death certainly seemed quite possible to him at this moment, he did not think it very probable. He noticed that his niece, Anni, had developed breasts.

Sighing, he locked up the shop and followed the girl to the village. He had not slept in his brother's farmhouse for years. Liese made up a bed for him in his old corner in the stable. She did not speak and she avoided his gaze. But for all that he saw, from her untroubled bright blue eyes, that she did not think Wilhelm was going to die.

Wilhelm lay on his bed, swathed in bandages, his eyes closed. A

number of people stood around watching to see how heavily the sick man breathed. There were a couple of S.A. boys and a few of the usual neighbours. The S.A. boys swore and uttered wild threats and made as much noise as the sick man. Not till they were out on the street did the neighbours say: 'That's what you get. You ought to keep out of such things.' At home they were afraid to talk like that before their sons.

Harms himself came with his followers from his village. Before he sat down on the one good chair, he stood a moment beside the bed in the stern posture he had seen Hitler assume in photographs when he visited a victim of the Red terror.

The next day the parson came too. Liese wiped off the chair with her apron and moved it up to the bedside. The parson looked anxiously at the wounded man's drawn face from which Liese was brushing away the flies. He said a few words about the Fifth Commandment and also hinted that, while it must be difficult for a seriously wounded man to give up any thought of revenge, it was his Christian duty to do so.

Wilhelm Nadler had a still more exalted visitor. He was now so much better that he swelled with pride when a car stopped in front of the house and Freiherr von Ziesen got out. As President of the National Union of Farmer War Veterans, it had been considered only proper for him to call on Wilhelm Nadler. Under his bed covers Wilhelm quivered from head to heels with joy at seeing at his bedside this man he had admired for so long above all other mortals. The visit was also a sign that he, Nadler, was a symbol in Ziesen's eyes of a power to which Ziesen must eventually yield. Wilhelm was proud of this visit and boasted before his comrades, particularly before Harms and his wife and his children, even before Christian, the poor wretch, who slept in the stable these days and helped with the chores about the house.

Christian, however, was quite unmoved by the important visit. As far as he was concerned, the Baron existed only from the ground up to his ankles, just the height of his shoes. At the most he thought to himself just as he had on his trip to Berlin: 'I really believe Wilhelm has bet on the right card this time. Funny - that dunderhead.'

As soon as his brother was up again and had recovered his grip, Christian went back to his boathouse.

III

Now that Geschke was unemployed, Marie was always looking for work of any sort. Emilie could not give her any. The workshop

was about to close because even the factory they had supplied steadily could not hold out any longer. Emilie was not so young any more. She had formed a friendship, a few years earlier, with a travelling salesman and had occasionally gone out dancing with him. But when this traveller went back to his wife in Dresden, her heart was far from broken. One evening Tante Emilie came upstairs to Marie and told her that her friend, whom she had almost forgotten, had turned up again on a business trip to Berlin. Just as of old, he invited Tante Emilie to a dance hall called 'The Wicked Seven'. Emilie decided not to go this time because her patent leather slippers were so worn. Instead, she invited the man from Dresden to her flat. She borrowed the remains of the coffee beans Marie always saved till Sunday. The man from Dresden brought a cake and a bottle of liqueur. Though she had not eaten and was a little drunk, Emilie did not find love with the man from Dresden as amusing as before. He showed her plainly that he was being very magnanimous – the evening in Emilie's courtyard flat cost him just as much as an evening in a decent, well-kept 'house', but after all, friendship was friendship. The following day was Sunday. Marie went up fairly early in the morning to Tante Emilie's to ask her for the coffee beans. After a coffeeless week the Sunday cup was Geschke's sole pleasure. The table was littered with dirty glasses, the remains of a mayonnaise and the rest of the liqueur. Emilie crept yawning out of bed. She wore green artificial silk. With her rumpled, red-dyed hair she looked like a witch. Her face was swollen from yawning. She gave Marie the money to buy fresh coffee. From his photograph on the breakfast table Tante Emilie's husband, who had been killed fourteen years before, looked down out of his round bullet eyes under his helmet, his hand in his uniform belt.

'What a pity,' said Emilie, 'your Helene isn't prettier!'

'You don't know Geschke if you say that,' Marie replied. 'He would beat her black and blue.'

When she came back with the bag of coffee Emilie was sitting before the still littered table, her face in her arms sobbing bitterly. 'Beat her black and blue,' she repeated. 'What shall I do? What shall I do? Schuppke wants to put me out from the courtyard. Imagine the shame of that! I moved in here with my August years ago. I worked here till they closed up. Schuppke is threatening to make me move to the fourth floor with the Graupes. They owe for their rent too. Together we could manage to pay our debts, that's what Schuppke thought. Then he wouldn't have two unpaid flats on his hands. I can't go live with the Graupes. You know I can't.'

In her mind's eye Marie had a picture of the Graupes whom one sometimes heard making a great noise downstairs. She said: 'No, Tante Emilie.' Sadly she ran her hand over the reddish hair which was already growing thin and white at the roots.

Franz was the only one in the family constantly in a good humour . . . a good humour, however, that was not contagious. Marie frowned when she heard him whistling on the stairs. He was not impudent to her, but cold. Sometimes she would get up at night when she heard him come in. Then he would drop into the kitchen chair, stretch out his legs, and light a cigarette. Marie looked at him thoughtfully: 'Shall I warm up the soup?'

'Rot,' said Franz, 'eat your soup yourselves.' He added in a gentler tone: 'You mustn't go to any trouble for me and you mustn't wait up till I come home. I get something in my stomach somewhere or other.'

He thought his mother had gone back to bed, but she still stood behind him, barefoot in her long nightgown. She thought: 'Franz is a handsome fellow, big and strong. It's a long time since I've had to mend anything for him. How is it his clothes last better these days? What has he done to make him so tired tonight?' Geschke warned him a couple of times: 'You needn't show up here at all any more. You can spend the night on the streets or with your new friends, for all I care.' Because Franz preferred to sleep at home, he never admitted openly where he kept himself. Something drew him back to the big familiar house filled from cellar to garret with people he had seen ever since he was a little boy. What drew him? Not the food, for he ate all he wanted elsewhere. He quarrelled with his father; he never paid any attention to his sister; he made fun of the little boy and he treated Marie like a stranger. His father's threat, however, had made an impression on him. Secretly he must have shrunk from severing the last tie.

Franz suddenly felt Marie's gaze on him. Slowly he turned, only the bright slits of his sleepy eyes visible.

'Why are you still standing about?' he asked. 'It's enough to give a fellow the creeps the way you work yourself to death for us all. And you still keep on believing that nonsense of father's. He thinks things will never be any better but he's miles behind the times. But you're much younger, mother! You don't need to be afraid of something new. The new is here, right on our doorstep. We'll all have better times soon. You could have them now if you'd listen to me instead of to the old man.'

Marie sat down on the kitchen sofa. She tucked her feet under her nightgown and wrapped herself in Helene's blanket. Helene was out somewhere with Heiner. At last the boy opened up: he talked freely and eagerly.

'Your father thinks those people, the Nazis, are against the masses,' she said. 'He thinks Hitler is just piling up money so he can lead the people by the nose. That's why he buys you boys white and brown shirts and leather belts. God knows how you'll pay it back later. Of course he also buys a lot for himself.'

'It's easy to see what a lot of nonsense my father has been talking,' Franz said violently. 'Hitler never buys anything for himself. He doesn't even eat meat. He doesn't drink a drop of wine. He hasn't a wife or a child and if father thinks the Nazis are against the people, just tell me who the people are then? You and I. And if we're better off and get work and you don't need to make watery soup out of three dried peas, that's what you call leading you by the nose, is it?'

'Maybe your Hitler doesn't eat meat,' Marie said, 'but it doesn't make our share any bigger. He is sure to have good friends who wouldn't object to a leg of mutton. And there are other tasty bits without meat – cherry cake with whipped cream, for instance.'

Geschke shouted from his bed: 'Where are you, Marie?'

'Go to sleep, Franz,' she said. 'You're tired. Whenever you eat something your mother hasn't cooked for you, just remember who pays the bill!'

He started to answer her violently, but gulped down his retort. Marie stood up. She took him by the forelock – no one had done that since he was a child except just once his teacher, Degreif – and gave him a gentle shake. But her eyes were firmly fixed on his: they were as blue as the evening sky, grey-blue and gentle. 'And as to the people . . . of course I belong to the people, and so do you. But the higher-ups who are now inviting you, I don't think they do. There are so few of those gentlemen that we could drive them away before they would know what was up. The masses you can't drive away. There are too many of us. You can stir us up one against the other – that way there will be fewer of us.'

Marie was dead tired, but she lay awake a long time. She had learned how much of life consists in waiting. Not just the usual waiting in line before shops, but waiting at night too, when you lie quiet. Waiting wore one out: it consumed time. Waiting had once destroyed her youth in a few hours, when she had waited in vain for her lover. Now she waited every night for her sons, at least for her own son, Hans. When Franz came too late that never

interfered with her sleep. Helene had to some extent taken over the waiting in Marie's place while she still slept in the kitchen. Of late she had been sleeping most of the time at Heiner's parents' flat. That left Marie alone with the three – Geschke and their two sons. She did not feel sure any more where the youngest boy kept himself. He was not happy and frank as he used to be. He had never been noisy, only quietly content; never in a temper, only stubborn. He now had joys and sorrows which he kept to himself. Perhaps he worried secretly because he was nearing the end of his schooldays and he faced a grown-up life, without that was free only in theory. He seemed to be depressed; he answered all her questions more roughly than before. She did not even know the name of the stranger who kept him away from her and to whom he was so devoted. She had thought her love was sufficient protection, but he slipped away from her like a kitten through a hole in an apparently solid hedge.

On Sundays he went to the Youth Shelter as before. He played games round the camp fire and learned one song after another. Whatever he did he was filled with surprise because he was not as happy there as he had been. Joy had fled. Martin had taken it with him. Hans still clung to Emmi. They kept close together like two children in a chilly wood. Emmi suffered the same sort of sorrow. Her elder sister had moved away with her husband, a railwayman. Emmi felt like a complete stranger in her own family because she had been devoted to this sister alone. No matter what had happened in the family – a quarrel between their parents, a poor meal, hunger, or one of her brothers' love affairs – the elder sister had always explained everything to the girl in a word. She had scolded and comforted her and everything had been all right. Now that she was gone, the world seemed empty to Emmi. Among all her brothers and sisters there was a Fritz whom, to be sure, she did not love so much as her sister, but who was fun. Her father was grumpy and bad-tempered; her mother worried and tearful. Fritz did not come to the Youth Shelter any more – he called it a kindergarten. He liked to go where there was something doing: to guard a meeting gave him the greatest thrill especially if you were allowed to chase the other party out of the room. He had been in jail twice, which made his father furiously angry. His mother had cried, but Fritz had come back as merry as ever. Emmi liked to be with him because everything else at home was so gloomy. Once at their midday meal they had had particularly disgusting horse-meat which tasted like sweet corpse flesh. Her brother suddenly swept everything off his

plate, ran out and vomited. Then he came back crying gaily: 'Look here, I've had enough.' The next day he came home with both pockets full of sausages. The neighbours said, cursing or laughing according to their temperaments, that Fritz and his friends had robbed a store before it opened for business. Then they had quickly divided the meat among the people. Fritz stood at the back of the counter wearing a white apron. As proudly as Kaiser Wilhelm he hurled one sausage after the other with a great swing into the crowd and each time he shouted, 'To my people!' By the time the police arrived the sausages were all gone. No one reported Fritz. His father complained: it was a scandal for a decent working man. He refused to eat the stolen food. Their mother cried, but hid the sausage in the oven.

A few days later Emmi said:

'Fritz has something up again. Look, Hans, why don't you go with him?'

That evening Hans came home in good time. Marie did not have to wait for him. The next morning she was surprised to see him get up so early. He took a train to the north of the city. There, behind the slaughterhouse, in the freezing night stood Emmi with her brother. Her hands were blue with cold and he was trying to warm them. Two or three boys gathered laughingly around the children to protect them from the bitter wind. Later they stood guard at the street corners to warn them in case the police should appear. Because she was the smallest, Emmi was given the job of crawling through a narrow cellarway. Hans was to climb over the outer wall and then, when Fritz gave two sharp whistles, over the inner one. Emmi would hand him something and he was to throw it over the wall on to the pavement. It was a carefully studied plan. The children had no thought of fear. Hans scaled the outer wall as easily as if he were in a gymnasium. The big boys began cracking jokes to hide their nervousness. Then they separated. Emmi crawled into her cellarway. Fritz whistled – not twice, because Emmi had not yet reached the inner wall, but three times. That meant police! Hans understood and turned on his heel. He was out on the street again in a flash. The big boys were nowhere in sight. Some instinct told him to run. He ran through the dark as if his life depended on it though there was no one behind him. He jumped aboard the first bus that passed. Fritz's whistle, the whistle warning him of the police, pierced him through and through. Suddenly he was terribly afraid. He peered around him fearfully.

That morning Hans went to school without his books. But he felt fairly safe there.

The big boys also escaped and the police found only the little girl. They pulled her out of the cellarhole by the feet and took her to the police station. Such a little thing, and so vicious! She looked even younger than her twelve years. Emmi shivered: she was afraid. Besides, she did not trust grown-ups any farther than she could see them, especially not when they were as strong as giants and wore uniforms and swords. Someone shoved her in front of the judge's bench; someone else fired question after question at her, sharp chins stuck forward like beaks, pointed beards bristled. She raised her brown eyes to that confusion of bristles and wrinkles and clefts as bewildered as a traveller who has lost her way in the mountains.

'Your name?'

'Emmi.'

'Age?'

'Twelve.'

'Who put you up to this?'

Emmi learned that a lie was more convincing if you did not hesitate.

'A strange man. He promised me a mark.'

'But you must have known the kid?'

'Which kid?'

'The one who jumped over the wall.'

She thought to herself, Hans would be here too if they had caught him. She had had bad luck; but they would never get Hans if she could help it.

'He must have been with the strange man,' she said. 'I don't know him.'

The man shouted at her as loudly as a chorus of fathers. But she merely kept repeating: 'I don't know him.' She was on the right track, she thought. They had not got him; otherwise they would not keep on shouting. Now and then one of the police would run his hand over her hair:

'You poor child.'

She thought: 'Ah! so that's their line now.'

She was dead tired; and so frightened that she vomited. One of the men laughed. Another said:

'Just see what she had in her stomach - potato peelings.'

They questioned her and the child explained:

'Mother thought she'd try them. She said it was a pity to throw all that thick stuff away.'

The policemen shrugged their shoulders. One of them gave her a penny. And everything would have turned out for the best if it had been left to the police in that district station. They took her home. Her father beat her; her mother cried. Later came the summons to appear before the Children's Court. And again the same questions; now sharp, now kindly. But not like at home with her father. Even if he did beat her, he still loved this child. And when her mother wept and implored she still loved her child too. But these people here did not care a rap for her; these people were the government. Fritz had told her that long ago.

'The police is the government; the court is the government, and we, we are against the government.'

At the Children's Court she stuck to the same story:

'A strange man. He promised me a mark. I don't know the boy.'

She was put on probation as a child lacking in will power, without strength of character, helpless.

Hans sat in school toying with the idea of never going back home again; just simply running away and hiding somewhere. He had never known fear before; he had never even imagined what people had to be afraid of. To him fear had always been a special trait of grown-ups along with other old traits. They were for ever being afraid of this and that; this one of the shop girl, that one of the foreman; another of the manager, another of the police. One man was afraid of his wife and one woman of her husband. And sometimes one of them was afraid of what his friend would say. Some children too were afraid of their parents and teachers. He had always had the utmost contempt for children who were contaminated by the evil of grown-ups. But when Emmi's brother whistled three times instead of twice, Hans had been scared stiff. And his fright grew out of all proportion. For the moment he felt safe at school, just as grown-ups feel safe for no reason at all in danger. The police, he thought, surely could not come into the schoolroom. However, they might nab him in front of the school door, so he slipped out through a side entrance into the courtyard. He would not have gone home had he not run into his mother in that very street. She had been buying something in one of the stores and she made him carry the market basket. The nearer they came to home the greater became his fear of the police. Perhaps they were waiting in front of the door for him. But he felt safer with his mother. Each step as he mounted the stairs held a thousand terrors for him. But nothing happened. His mother finally began to wonder why he crept around so silently, keeping as close to her as possible. Once she had worried about his

comings and going: now she wondered uneasily what the boy could be afraid of to make him stay so close to home. One night she got up and went into the bedroom where he slept with his brother. Hans was alone in the big bed: his brother had not come home. Marie sat down beside him. She was not surprised to find him awake. She had known that something was robbing him of his peace.

'No one can hear us now,' she said. 'What has come over you?'

'Me?' Hans asked. 'Nothing.'

'Then that's all right. I must have been mistaken when I thought you were afraid of something.'

At first he said: 'What should I be afraid of?'

But as Marie sat there quietly, the truth finally crept out like a mouse out of its hole.

'I can't stop thinking about the police.'

Marie was alarmed. She herself had never had any bad experiences with the police. A man like Triebel, who dabbled in things that were forbidden by the government, perhaps. And that Frau Mahlke who sometimes stole food out of the market stalls – she might have reason to be afraid. In Marie's family it was not customary to try to outwit the law. And Franz, who always scoffed at the government, simply stayed away when he felt it wasn't safe. The word police frightened her, however, for she had a deeply ingrained awe of the power of the State.

'What do the police want with you?' she asked.

Between despair and relief the boy began to pour out his story. Marie sat thinking quietly for a moment. Then she said:

'If Emmi had betrayed you the police would have been here long before this.'

'She's not like that,' Hans said eagerly as if he had never had a moment's fear. 'Of course she hasn't.' Suddenly he felt that there was something more important than all the beatings and all the reproaches.

'Why did you get into a mess like that?' Marie asked. 'I can't always be with you. I really can't. Only your conscience can do that. Your conscience doesn't have to cook for you and the others. It doesn't have to mend and earn money. It has nothing else to do but to look after you day and night. Even when you are far from home with a lot of crazy people who are just out to cheat you. Even when you are utterly alone. Your conscience is much smaller than Emmi; it can creep through police barriers; it can creep through a keyhole; it always comes to you. It will always tell you the truth. That's why it is there.'

Geschke called: 'Marie!'

As she went out of the room she said: 'Now go to sleep. Nothing will happen now.'

When he was alone Hans sat up and leaned on his elbows. There it was, sitting at the foot of his bed: his conscience. It was very small, his mother had said, even tinier than Emmi. A dwarf-like little manikin, as black as night. But at dawn it turned grey and vanished.

IV

Geschke was quiet as soon as Marie lay down beside him. But he did not fall asleep. Instead he lay there with wide-open eyes. For minutes at a time it was so quiet in the house that he heard old Schwanke upstairs snoring. How strong old Schwanke still was! He, Geschke, was tired through and through: tired out from just pottering around in the kitchen, from standing at the dole office, from running after part-time work, now snow-shovelling, now clearing away wreckage. He was so tired that he could not sleep any more. Any minute now the Krauters' baby would begin to cry in the room across the courtyard.

Triebel had not been up to see him since he had thrown him out of the kitchen that time he was so angry. Last summer they had had another bad quarrel. There he was, squalling already, that kid of the Krauters'! And upstairs Mueller would soon pound on the floor for quiet as if poor Frau Krauter could turn off that screeching.

Geschke's fight with Triebel had been after one of his many sleepless nights. Only that night had been different. He had got up quietly so as not to wake anyone. Alone in the kitchen he had tried to see whether he was still strong enough to lift the kitchen cupboard. He might need his gun tomorrow morning in case they called him early in the day. The Prussian government had been shamefully deposed, its own minister kicked out of his own office room like a tramp!

The cupboard was filled with a lot of stuff and Geschke was no longer as young as he had been. To be sure, he wasn't an old man – not at all, but not so young as once upon a time, when he would have thought nothing of a little job like that.

Someone upstairs began to pound on the floor. Mueller was shouting and Krauter was swearing from down below. And in the midst of it all the baby began squalling louder than ever.

That night Geschke had moved the cupboard by himself and without any noise. But the next morning no one came. The deposed minister did not call Geschke; he called the district attorney. Geschke had waited and waited until at last he thought he might as well

throw the gun into the Spree. All of a sudden he felt so old and so weak that even the coal-scuttle was too heavy for him to lift, not to mention his gun, and of course, the kitchen cupboard. When he passed Triebel's door Triebel shouted at him from the threshold:

'What makes you puff so when you go upstairs? Mourning for your minister, eh? You can't do anything about that. He has given authority the go-by. He said so himself.'

Geschke had flown into a rage:

'You fellows helped to put him out. It suits you fine the way things have turned out: that's just what you wanted.'

- The Krauter baby had fallen asleep.

He heard a drunk bawling up and down the street. That would be Graupe from Tante Emilie's house. He always yodelled when he was drunk as if Berlin were in the Tyrol.

'It suits you fine the way things turned out. It's just what you wanted.'

Whereupon Triebel answered quietly, though his big ears were red:

'Today is not yesterday. The gang wants to get rid of the man now to put a worse one in his place.'

Geschke, however, was never one to weigh the pros and cons. He shook with rage and grief. He began to swear as he stood there on the landing. And the more he realized that he was about to lose something dearer and more important to him than life the more wildly he cursed. Triebel, too, lost his temper.

'There's no help for a man who won't take advice,' he shouted, so that once again Geschke said to Marie: 'I don't want anything more to do with him.' Since then, they had never once run into each other on the stairs.

Geschke heard the tram whistle, the last one perhaps, for it was not time for the first. At least he had not noticed any pauses between.

When the Nazis held their demonstration on Buelowplatz in front of Liebknecht's house he himself had hoped they would be crushed. He had fully realized how senseless it would have been to shoot at the Nazis. The crowd of men and women milling about would have been shot down in no time at all. In the depths of his heart he had looked for something he knew to be senseless and childish; the very thing he had always despised. Heretofore, he had avoided the Liebknecht house like the pest. He regretted the Nazi deployment on the Buelowplatz, as if that house and not the Reichschancellery into which Hitler had moved were the heart of Berlin, the secret, despised heart.

The night was as silent now for a few seconds as if everything had ceased moving in the great city . . . everything but his thoughts – and they went on for ever.

He had run into Triebel just once, the way such things happen – not on the stairs, but deep in the heart of the city. As he had received no orders – or counter-orders for that matter – Geschke had gone with the demonstration. The day had been icy cold; he froze in his thin, shabby clothes every time the parade came to a halt. He would have been there even if bullets had whistled. Freedom was dead, he had no doubt of that; and it could not be brought to life again. He was not even sure any more what freedom was. Of late years his life had been bad enough – before that, even worse – and, since the war, drab and burdensome, lightened on rare occasions by a bit of luck, an intermittent hope that things might still change. Now all that was at an end. Geschke did not put much faith in the hopes of a couple of his friends who always said:

‘Give Hitler enough rope and he will hang himself.’

Every time a weak industrial council yielded ground or a strike failed, wages never rose afterwards of their own accord. If you offered so much as a little finger, those on top always took the whole hand.

That had not been the last tram he heard but the first, for now here came the second.

There was a sound of whistling and wheels and even creaking in the hallway. Then he could hear people walking on the street.

Geschke himself had felt bad when Zoergiebel shot at the red flags four years ago in May. Triebel had probably been right; that was the beginning of the end. And later, when his party elected Hindenburg, Triebel had been right too: this will end with Hitler, he had said. At first Hindenburg had despised Hitler: in the end he had received him. Perhaps Geschke should have followed Triebel's example and broken with his own party. Why had he not done so? He had not wholly believed him; on one point perhaps, but not all. He could not believe in the great revolution that was supposed to be at hand and that would make a clean sweep of everything. Nor did he believe in any one man. There was no one who inspired him with confidence: no one he could follow. That was the root of Geschke's misfortune: he had lost his faith.

Much more penetrating than all the noises of the awakening city was the sound of the first cock crowing, probably in the night watchman's shed down at the big garage.

Yes, that was the root of his misfortune: he had lost his faith. A man needs a great deal of strength to carry out something he

believes in. Whether it is only the patience to lead human beings slowly forward, in spite of backslidings and disappointments, or whether he gambles his all, his whole life, his whole experience on the revolution.

Most of all, a man needs strength to be capable of belief. He, Geschke, had no strength left. No matter what he thought of, he no longer believed in it.

Now he could hear someone coming from the square, shuffling and puffing; that was sure to be Bolzer from the fourth floor. One man was the first to go off to work as another was the last to come home from boozing. That was the way life went.

Freedom was dead. But he could not have sat in the kitchen just like every morning when that huge funeral procession was taking place. Not for years had there been such a tremendous demonstration. Geschke stopped at a street corner. Someone in a nearby booth offered him a cup of hot coffee. He swallowed it with frozen jaws and flung down his penny.

'It doesn't cost anything.' The woman in the booth was blue with cold. She had brought the coffee down from her own kitchen. He tossed the penny into the Red Cross box, for the first and last time in his life. It was at this booth that he ran into Triebel.

Now he heard a continued rumbling in the hall. In a few minutes there would be a wild din of beatings and whinings and poundings from upstairs and down, because Bolzer generally came home drunk. Now the noise began, and the whining. The Krauters' baby, frightened by the uproar, started to cry again. Someone pounded on the floor. How he envied the people who could be roused out of a deep sleep!

Both Triebel and Geschke had been about to speak, but neither of them had said anything. Only their jaws had twitched, perhaps from the cold. They had not shaken hands; they had nodded to each other in reconciliation or farewell. Geschke stepped back into the ranks of his group and Triebel into his. He never saw Triebel at the house after that.

The baby was quiet now. It would soon be time for Loerke's alarm to go off; he still had work. A truck stopped at the corner of the street. Geschke heard men jump down; he heard firm steps along the street. They stopped in front of the house; the street door banged. Marie suddenly sat straight up in bed. The steps came thundering up the stairs; it sounded like police. It sounded even wilder than police, with doors banging, fists pounding, boots stamping. They stopped on the floor below, at Triebel's without any

doubt. There was a heavy blow against the door and the sound of objects splintered and smashed. A woman shrieked. People came running from every door into the hall. Marie leapt out of bed.

Watching from the kitchen door, Geschke could see how the S.A. pushed Triebel downstairs. One S.A. man stood on the landing and twisted Frau Triebel's arms almost out of their sockets. She bit his uniform. He twisted her arms till she sank to her knees and fell on the floor. The people crowded into the hallway. Those ruffians in brown shirts who pulled anyone they wanted out of their houses and loaded them straight into their truck, shouting rough commands, were protected by full police authority. A man could not bash in their heads as he would have done only last week, if they had so much as dared to break down a door. Where did they suddenly get the right? Why didn't other men simply break their heads for them? Why didn't all the others in the house turn out in force to help Triebel? There had been rows often enough before when men had not been afraid of the police's clubs and pistols.

'What's happened?' the frightened occupants asked one another. They crowded from the stairs into kitchens wherever a door stood open.

'The Reichstag is burning. The Communists are said to have set it on fire.'

'Why only the Reichstag?'

'Couldn't that bunch think of a cleverer trick than that?' Melzer came upstairs shaking with cold. His wife put his coat around him.

'I thought something bad was going to happen,' he said. 'When Saturn is in the ascendant something always happens.'

'Oh, shut up with your stars!' Frau Melzer seized this excellent opportunity to take a quick look around the strange kitchen. Gone were the days when she could stick her nose into Geschke's house-keeping to her heart's desire. In bad times, she thought, a person doesn't need to put up worn white curtains at the kitchen windows.

'I said to myself only yesterday when Triebel went out, the Communists ought not to start anything under this sign.'

'You silly idiot, it wasn't the Communists who did it.'

But Melzer persisted stubbornly:

'They made fun of me whenever I warned people of a constellation; no wonder it failed.'

v

Lieven stopped his tiny car in front of a flower shop. He liked to give himself Christmas presents. This year the bonus from the bank

had been big enough to pay for the new car. He ran his eyes quickly over the flowers and finally chose a simple bunch of violets wrapped in a little tin-foil. As he walked the few steps to the revolving door of the Hotel Adlon he swung the violets between two fingers.

He glanced in amusement at the large placard: 'Come to Five O'clock Tea at the Hotel Adlon and Enjoy Pleasant Warmth.' Outside one caught a faint echo of the concert behind the heavy glass windows. The warm air that greeted him as he entered was pleasant indeed. Pleasant too were the countless glances from all the eyes at all the tables, the silent, unobtrusive glances of men and women so well-bred that nothing ever seemed to impress them – least of all a tall, well-built young man in the black S.S. uniform, swinging a little bunch of violets wrapped in tin-foil between his fingers. Lieven stood still in the middle of the lobby. He was perfectly aware that everyone was curious to see whom this attractive man had come to meet. Their curiosity was satisfied when a young girl, standing in a corner, moved towards him. Her cloth suit, obviously made by a first-class tailor, revealed just enough of her beautiful slender figure. She wore no jewels save a pair of earrings – all the more noticeable because her untrimmed coat opened to show her bare neck and her hair was brushed severely back from her forehead. They were the same earrings she had worn at her brother's house – an inheritance from her mother.

Lieven and the girl sat down and ordered tea with rum. The admiring glances constantly turned in their direction, the soft music, assured them that they made a handsome couple. Elisabeth Lieven began talking about herself: she was still receptionist at the sanatorium on the Buchler Höhe. Her employer had invited her to the theatre in Berlin over the week-end. Yesterday they had seen 'Die Kaiserin' at the *Volksbühne*. Lieven stole a sidelong glance at this cousin who struck him as far more attractive here than in her brother's house.

'Why do you go to see a play for which a Jew wrote the music?'

Elisabeth laughed merrily. 'You seem to think your black uniform obliges you to have all sorts of opinions. I can put up with it, however, because it is really very becoming. But you needn't worry. The Fuehrer himself sat straight in front of me. I'm not damaging our race.'

He looked at her out of the corner of his eyes without turning his head. She looked back at him the same way. He laughed and said:

'No, really, Elisabeth, we two look alike. The same eyes; we laugh over the same things; and we are indifferent to the same things.'

'Does that mean we are well matched or not?'

'I think tonight we are very well matched.'

He stood up. She put her hand on his arm. Slowly, proud of each other, they walked straight through the gaping crowd. He put her in the car. She leaned her face against his back. At night the city was covered with hoar-frost: it glistened in the Tiergarten and in the grooves of shop windows and on wires and poles. They drew up to the curb in front of the house on Kurfürstendamm where Lieven now lived.

'We're going up to my place,' Lieven said. 'I have to be ready at seven. Alarm.'

The entrance hall was furnished with carpets and mirrors. Lieven unlocked the door to the flat, then the one of his room which was large and almost magnificently adorned with mirrors and soft rugs like those in the lobby. There was a private telephone. Elisabeth looked at everything: photographs of people she did not know; the icon he took everywhere with him; a little oil painting by Nolde, for which he had paid the price of a few months' salary; his former landlady's picture of Hitler. He had decided to hang this up after all to counter his comrades' sarcastic questions about the oil painting. He pushed the armchair up to the radiator. Elisabeth still held her violets in her hand.

'No matter how long you sit by a red-hot radiator,' she said, 'only a wood fire really warms you. Do you remember ours, at home on the estate?'

He ran his hand over her hair, shutting his eyes as if he were stroking with deep enjoyment a rare and expensive vase of very old and fragile polished metal.

'What, still homesick?'

'Always homesick. Never anything else. It is sixteen years now since we left. Everything reminds me of home: every snowstorm; every smell. Do you think we will ever go back again?'

'Of course,' he said. And he did not smile. 'I promise you, you shall go home.'

She began to laugh. 'You say that so seriously that I believe you.' Then she jumped up, ran to the balcony door and began to shake it. They stood side by side looking down on the street. In spite of the lights in the houses and the headlights of cars flashing past, the street looked lonely under the starry sky.

'Why do you have to stay at home?' she asked.

'Can't be helped. The moment they call me, I have to go into the city.'

'You've become very conscientious. You take your work very seriously.'

'Yes, I do, it's worth while, too.'

'How? I think it never pays to take things seriously.'

'It does when you know what it is all about.'

'Well, what is it all about, my dear?'

'The most important things. Whether you go back to your estate again or have to keep on earning money all your life in your crazy sanatorium. Whether I can invite you to tea at the Adlon or at the most to a cafeteria. Whether I have to sell electric advertising signs or continue to wear my uniform.'

'In any case I thought this evening was going to be more fun or I wouldn't have been so ready to come. You are very correct, very prim.'

'What do you want me to do? I can't leave, I have to wait for the call. What would you like? The gramophone?'

'Have you a nigger record?'

'Certainly not. I can't afford those now. I don't dare to estrange the German nation, not even to please you.'

Elisabeth laughed.

'Oh dear! Oh dear! I've already told you dozens of times today how well you look in your uniform! But I'm afraid you have let yourself in for a rather painful sacrifice.'

'But I've told you why it pays to put up even with this vulgar nonsense. Shall I turn on the radio?'

'Good Lord, what a bore! Why is one never bored in the country? One is never bored in a lonely wood. But here on Kurfürstendamm with all these lights and buses, one is bored to tears.'

'What about a little love?'

'Boring.'

'What else then? Suggest something.'

She put her arms around his neck. He waited a moment, arms hanging at his sides, feigning reluctance to make her exert her charms the more. He did not speak. Silence now – no sound in all the house of steps or of glasses clinking or of pointless words. Only whenever a bus passed, the house shook from top to bottom.

Later she said: 'One might think you were in the midst of war, lying on the edge of a military highway ready to march.'

He moved a little away from her and lighted a cigarette. He had already smoked five or six when the telephone rang. He jumped up:

'Yes, sir!' he shouted into the receiver and quickly straightened his clothes. He fastened on his belt which hung on the back of the chair

beside Elisabeth's neatly folded suit. 'The call I've been expecting. I've got to report to headquarters at once.'

Elisabeth said sleepily: 'What's happened?'

'I'll find that out there. We'll have to take over something or other or clean out some part of the city.'

'Does this give you a thrill?'

'My God, a thrill!' said Lieven. 'It's my job. Sometimes it's boring. Sometimes I really get a kick out of it, for instance when the Reds have cooked up something and resist like mad. It's fun then to beat them down. Or when you happen to get a real live Red in your hands. It's always exciting to crush a really stubborn revolt. *Auf Weidensehen*, Elisabeth. I don't know when I can get back. You'll probably go back to Dresden with your boss!'

'Not till tomorrow. Oh yes; it's already past twelve now. Tomorrow is already here.'

Part Two

Eleven

I

LIEVEN GOT UP from the table early in the evening and excused himself to his friends. They had engaged a private dining-room in the hotel where they could talk freely and undisturbed. As he walked through the public dining-room uniformed guests sitting at various tables with their families turned towards him, as if a puff of wind blew all the branches on a bush in the same direction, and gave him the Hitler salute. The *maitre d'hôtel* hurried ahead of him to hold open the door. Lieven shut it so quickly behind him that he almost caught the man's raised arm in it.

He entered the station café where Elisabeth was waiting for him.

'We have two hours,' she said. 'I have to take the night train back to Dresden. My boss is sending the car so that I can bring the guests who are coming on the same train with me to the sanatorium.'

She was wearing a short jacket which showed off her slender hips, small breasts and straight shoulders to the best advantage – the tailor had charged a considerable part of her month's salary for it. She was also wearing her dead mother's earrings.

'How long are you going to keep up this crazy notion that you have to support yourself?'

'My dear Ernst,' said Elisabeth, 'I can't go and live with Otto in the country. It bores me. Even Otto has developed a bad habit out of sheer boredom: he sits and meditates for hours at a time over all sorts of things. And the worst of it is, he thinks aloud. You have to listen to him at mealtimes and, what is even worse, sometimes even give your own opinion. And as there is always something new happening nowadays, it goes on for ever. Every time I go there for a holiday he invites me to share a new enthusiasm. And he's horribly upset because I am quite oblivious of the most important things of all!'

'What does he consider the most important things?' asked Lieven.

'Night after night he and the German schoolmaster talk German Socialism. There is no need for trade unions and parties any more,

he says. On May the First all Germans celebrated the union of labour under one swastika flag. He feels he has a mission to enlighten me.' She added with laughing eyes: 'He says he has to strike a spark out of my icy heart. I'd be only too glad to see the little spark that would leap out of *me*. But he doesn't strike any; he just talks and talks. I did not come here to complain of my brother when I am lucky enough to have a cousin attending this crazy trial. How is it going? The radio suddenly went dead. We could only get hints of it now and then in the newspapers of our foreign patients.'

'The whole thing is being handled much more lightly and superficially than I feared.'

'Lightly, why? Dimitroff seems to be a very capable fellow.'

'I wasn't speaking of him: I'm speaking of the conduct of the case, of those stereotyped judges in their old robes. They ought to have taken a look at the defendant beforehand. It's not enough to bring a man to court just because he happens to have been employed by the Comintern. They have just as clever fellows as we do. One must never underestimate the enemy. The fellow's impudent replies roused the people who had already calmed down. I wouldn't be at all surprised if we got something like burning the Reichstag in earnest. They're already handing out leaflets.'

'What sort of replies?'

'When Goering shouted at him, he said: "You're afraid of me, aren't you?" When Goering roared at him to shut his mouth, that he was a filthy thug from a barbarous country, he said that his land was not wild and barbarous, but Fascism was barbarous and that was in every land. His replies are already being used as texts for leaflets; fortunately most people are too stupid to know what it's all about.'

Elisabeth laughed.

'All right, you can laugh,' Lieven shouted; 'and what is worse; thirty million people are laughing. All the careful police work we've done – all for nothing. They dug up a whole string of women the fellow had been running round with. They wouldn't talk – at least nothing one could use would make them. On the contrary one of the women did not hesitate to say before the court that she had been with him the night of the Reichstag fire.'

'He sounds quite a man,' said Elisabeth. 'I wouldn't have minded being there myself.'

'You can laugh, but we don't find it in the least funny. For if there is any German law that can save Dimitroff from the prisoner's dock, then it isn't a law we want. Either he is right, or we are. And if he is

right, you'll have even your earrings torn off and I'll be wearing a shabby suit – I've told you all this often enough.'

'Oh dear, you and my brother,' sighed Elisabeth, 'you are never satisfied with me. I'm always laughing at the wrong things.'

'I'm not out to amuse you. Be as cold as you like, but understand. If it amuses you never to go back to your estate again and always to have to earn your living, then you've every right to get a laugh out of Dimitroff. Understand that once and for all.'

'Good, I understand,' said Elisabeth, 'I won't laugh any more, I won't enjoy myself any more.' During the last moments she had listened to him as closely as she had watched him. Once or twice she started to interrupt, but before she could ask the questions, he had answered them. Something still bothered her, and was not quite clear. Because all the reasons Lieven gave were obvious to her, she looked more sharply than usual at his face. It was a face she knew well and trusted. His teeth, though regular and sharp were too small; like a mouse's teeth. She thought, 'That is the only thing I don't like about him.'

One night when Lieven returned to his apartment on Kurfürstendamm, he found a message to ring up Siebert at once. The office of the government police had once been the paymaster's office of an infantry regiment; since then it had been a department of the Red Cross Tuberculosis Fund, a soup kitchen, a tax bureau, and finally headquarters of the state police.

Lieven was expected. He was led up the inner stairs, immaculately clean, but still bearing the ineradicable atmosphere of government office buildings. His own chief, Siebert, met him in the writing-room on the second floor. As Lieven walked into the room Siebert made a slight gesture in the direction of the S.A. boys standing around him in a half circle, whereupon, with a sullen 'Heil Hitler', they withdrew.

Siebert first offered Lieven a chair, then a cigarette. He leaned far back in his armchair.

'A common fellow like Siebert gets downright pleasure from making out reports,' thought Lieven. 'It makes him feel extraordinarily useful.'

'I've been waiting for you,' said Siebert. 'We've got our hands on a certain Laemmle – he's the courier we've been looking for for weeks. The fellow was ill in the West-end Hospital. He had had his appendix removed. We arrested the doctor. The nurse noticed that

both doctor and patient stopped talking the minute she entered the room and she reported them.

'This Laemmle knows the addresses we need; at least four of them, possibly all. I had him brought here at once. But before I got here his wound had unfortunately opened. I sent for our doctor and he put on a new bandage. We've been waiting for you to give you a chance to try your luck. Lately you've been inclined to accuse us of being amateurs, lacking in – what do you call it? – psychology. Now you have a chance to show us how an expert would handle things. See if you can get anything out of him before he sets off for the next world. So far he is still able to undergo examination.'

They went over to the other building. Conversations broke off. Heels clicked. The doctor was a thin, elderly man in the S.S. uniform, with a bald, almost white head. The courtroom smelled like a sickroom. The prisoner lay on the bench, his shirt pulled up, and a fresh muslin bandage on. At a certain distance along the walls the S.A. boys were lined up; they stared motionless at the proceedings around the bench. The doctor knelt down beside the prisoner; he dampened a piece of cotton with some alcohol from a flask and held it under the man's nose. Two very young S.A. boys leaned against each other; their noses twitched. Siebert said:

'If you please, Lieven.'

The doctor yielded his place.

Lieven said: 'Kindly send the whole crowd outside, Siebert.'

The man on the bench gave a start when Siebert barked out the command: 'Dismiss.'

Lieven frowned; he pulled the shirt gently over the bandaged stomach. As he raised his head the man's eyes were looking straight at him. They were so dark a blue that they were almost black; they had that strange lustre untouched by the shadows of earthly things that only the eyes of the dying show.

Lieven said very softly: 'I just arrived. I came here at once when I heard that you had been arrested. I have not been able to prevent what they did to you, but I can prevent the worst now.'

He did not know whether the prisoner understood him. Before the intolerable brilliance of those dying eyes, Lieven lowered his eyelids. He went on softly:

'I will do whatever I can to help you. Perhaps you can leave here at once. I'll order a car. I have the greatest respect for a man like you.'

The man moved his lips slightly. The doctor handed Lieven a damp cloth. Lieven quickly wiped the blood away, then he put the

damp cloth on the man's forehead. The man blinked. Some of the brilliance went out of his eyes. Perhaps he was trying to understand who was the new man in the black uniform with the soft voice.

'The people who are still trying to rescue you are most of them dead,' Lieven went on. 'You do not want to betray any of your comrades. That I can understand. I like that. I respect you.'

Siebert, who was listening attentively, handed Lieven a piece of paper. The man followed every movement with keen eyes that were no longer so bright.

'You don't know Herbert Mueller? Good. Only that he is dead. So you didn't know him; that's all right. After all, it won't make any difference to him whether you knew him or didn't know him when you yourself are dead. When I leave this room, the S.A. will come back. I cannot do anything more for you. What's going to happen then? You must have asked yourself that question often: What's going to happen then? What good will all your stoicism do you then? And Betz? – a certain Anton Betz? You don't know him either? He's walking about in the sun right now. He had money and fled to Paris; he's drinking coffee at Montparnasse; he is laughing. But you – you're lying here, in order to save him. And Berger, who took over his job . . .'

The prisoner's eyes were dull. Lieven could see nothing reflected in them but the black of his uniform. He pressed the damp cloth gently to the man's temples; he wiped the remains of a trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth.

Siebert jerked the door open. He shouted into the corridor: 'This way, men!'

'Too bad, Laemmle, you placed so much faith in your Party. Where is that Party now? Where is there help for you? Doesn't look as though they're sending you any private aeroplane. You don't seem to count as much with them as Dimitroff. Good old Dimitroff, yes – he's got the worst behind him.'

The prisoner sat up straight; he cried out in surprise:

'He got off?'

Then he collapsed. A trickle of blood came from his mouth. Lieven was furious at himself because he had made the mistake of sending the dying man to his grave with a comforting word.

Shouting and the tread of many feet sounded on the other side of the door. Lieven sprang up. A light came into the man's eyes as he heard. Death rushing towards him cleaving the air on swift wings. His features still wore an expression of joy at the last news he had heard.

On a spring afternoon, too rainy for them to stay in the garden, the whole Malzahn family, including Tante Amalie, Lenore, her son and a couple of guests settled down in the living-room. The two sisters-in-law poured out tea. Everyone praised Frau von Malzahn's cakes, much to the old lady's delight. They were her own recipe made of toasted oat flakes which she had carried over from the World War. Her husband's pension did not permit of lavish entertainment for her guests. It had become the custom, at their gatherings, to read aloud the letters Wenzlow wrote to his wife, 'the little Malzahn', as she was still known among her friends. Two younger guests, Wenzlow's former comrades, belonged to the *Bund Deutscher Offiziere*; one of them was a bank official, the other, Stachwitz, had been Wenzlow's best friend not only in Hanover but from their youth. He was the same Stachwitz who never went on leave without coming to call on Tante Amalie, in whose good graces, despite his pranks and misdemeanours, he had remained ever since his childhood. The two fathers wore the Iron Cross in their buttonholes. In this living-room one saw neither brown or black shirts, and the only swastika was on Helmut's white Hitler Youth shirt. The boy was pleased because Major Stachwitz had expressly invited him. Otherwise his aunt would certainly have forbidden him to be present when the letters were read. He looked upon his school terms in Potsdam as a necessary evil between the long holidays at his guardian's in Elteville. When the Fuehrer's name was mentioned in that house there were no jokes with a double meaning, no sneering or turning down the corners of the mouth. Such things would not have been tolerated. Uncle Klemm had explained that this was only suppressed rage on the part of officers now out of the service. They couldn't swallow the fact that Hitler had forbidden the Stahlheim. They would clamour for one pot for all as long as their own extra sausage was allowed to cook in it. As to Tante Amalie's scornful innuendoes that the S.S. thugs fancied themselves equal to Prussian officers, Helmut's Elteville uncle called that an old wife's tale. The boy was still waiting impatiently to learn what his mother thought about it all. Sharp as his tongue had become, he still did not dare to say much in her presence. She often turned her eyes toward him with an expression he did not understand but which cut him to the heart. He saw hope and sorrow and doubt; something that both fascinated and oppressed him and which he did not recognize as love.

The young cousins in Elteville were lucky to have a father who

had already thrown in his lot with the Fuehrer in the days when people were still ridiculing him. On Helmut's last visit he had been given to understand that his father and mother had not got on well. In Wiesbaden they had pointed out a very beautiful woman who had waved smilingly to them with a special glance for the boy. He had recognized her vaguely. In their Hitler Youth Home all three boys had stood at attention before the beautiful lady's companion, a high S.S. official. The elder cousin observed: 'She was almost your mother once upon a time.'

Helmut thought constantly of these events as he sat pulling threads out of the Malzahn's tablecloth, a thing he had so often been forbidden to do. He did not know that Malzahn had purposely asked him to this tea because he was the only one who wore a swastika on his arm. Malzahn had been worried by remarks that had come to his ears about these meetings at his house that were so totally lacking in any National Socialist character. It was not necessary to pay too much attention to the half-grown boy, but nevertheless the swastika on the slender arm was documentary proof.

Old Malzahn himself read the first letter aloud. Tante Amalie and her niece Lenore had already heard it three times. With narrowed eyes Tante Amalie happily observed the curiosity of all the guests.

'You can't imagine, dear Tante, with what emotion we here in the Far East have received the news that has reached us from home. I believe that now certain fears, certain reservations connected with Hitler's rise to power, even the doubts from which I occasionally suffered myself, have been silenced. We Germans have at last found our line of march. We are now faced with a *fait accompli* and the thing that set all our minds at rest was the meeting of Hindenburg and Hitler at the grave of Frederick the Great where they clasped hands. That was a portentous moment for all of us in the history of the Fatherland. I think that, at that moment, you and I, Tante, must have experienced the same emotions.

'I thanked God that he had allowed my son to come into the world at a moment when Germany has conquered that lack of unity, proverbial in our history, and is entering upon a new future . . .'

As Malzahn finished reading, the living-room was filled with all those little noises that always mark a momentary silence when no one can think of anything to say – noises such as tea drinking and clearing of throats and clinking of teacups.

Each person present felt as if the son of the house had admonished

them lightly, from far away, for many remarks that had been casually dropped in the same place in Potsdam when the Reichstag opened: 'the sly old fox' or 'the journey with the corporal can't have been any pleasure jaunt for the Field-Marshal'. But new thoughts struck them too: 'Wenzlow is far away from the whole thing. Perhaps he gets a clearer perspective'; or 'That made a favourable impression abroad'; or 'Perhaps our sons will have a future after all'. Old Malzahn said what he always said in such circumstances: 'Wait and see!' Only Helmut Klemm without any ulterior thought turned shining eyes on the letter as if he were looking at the writer himself. Stachwitz said:

'I'd quite forgotten Fritz had the habit of thanking God.' For this he received an angry glance from Tante Amalie.

Ilse, 'the little Malzahn', then read the second letter aloud in an embarrassed girlish voice as if she were reciting a poem in class and emphasizing the important points:

'My dearest girl,' - here she blushed and the guests grinned - 'for that is what you still are and always will be to me, even though your picture with our three children stands on the desk in front of me.

'I have gone through very difficult hours and am the richer for an ugly experience. One evening when this Chinese, Hansin Liao, my friend Boland and I were playing *skat* together, the Chinese left the room. We thought nothing of it and not till the following morning did we learn to our surprise that he had deserted in Schroeder's car. The car was found by the military police on the road. Where had he gone? He made a beeline for the south, to all appearances to the city where the Red forces lie. In my earlier letters I probably sang hymns of praise about this man. I considered him an exception among his countrymen, though I frequently wrote you prophetically that one must never trust this race. Now I see how justified my superior officers were in warning me never to get involved in too intimate relations with these people, even when they apparently come up to our standard. The worst of it is he took with him a few notes which I had laid out on my writing-desk. I never would have suspected this man, who had to all appearances served us loyally for two years. From this you can judge the cunning and underhand tricks of these people. And how dangerous this cunning can be when accompanied by patience which is a truly Asiatic quality. Where else but here could people patiently endure the most ghastly suffering with unspeakable, almost animal indifference?

They are trained by nature to feign indifference and submission. And to think that a man of his culture and good manners, instead of feeling drawn to us, should have been in league with the worst elements!

In the pause that followed, Lenore Klemm got up quickly to offer the guests some cake. She knew that she was one of those guests who are not fully included in any group, but whom one cannot exclude either, and she was always trying to justify her presence by making herself useful in little ways. She sat down again in her corner, but got up immediately to pour tea for Stachwitz. Her son, watching her suspiciously, noticed that their fingers touched on the edge of the blue-flowered porcelain saucer. For the first time Stachwitz noticed that her eyes changed colour, perhaps from some inner excitement, perhaps because of her brother's news. He said:

'A completely crazy fellow, this interpreter.' Stachwitz was engaged to a girl with whom he was much in love and whom he wanted to marry soon. He would have liked to break down the barriers that separated this strange silent woman in her corner, his best friend's sister, from the other guests. He would have liked to involve her in a conversation since nothing more intimate was possible.

'What could have driven him to such a step?' he said.

'That's what I'd like to know,' said Lenore, 'but who here could tell us that?'

Ilse Wenzlow waited till the expressions of disapproval and astonishment around the table quieted down.

'My dear child, you will realize that this man's betrayal has hurt me deeply, for I looked upon him almost as a friend. I now long more and more for the day when I can be with our own people again and can hold you in my arms. You can see from this occurrence that our work in this land is filled with problems which we, with the best will in the world, are unable to solve. And yet we are now on the point of accomplishing great things. We have enlarged the chain of forts around the Red zone and have built military high-ways and airfields from which to bomb those Red nests of resistance. We have received reinforcements of troops that have been fighting bitterly against the Japanese in Shanghai. Even now there are voices raised against these troops trained to fight under present conditions. There are those who would rather have them quartered farther north than see them bring order into their own land first. So far, the

General has been wise enough to want to clean up things at home first and turn his attention to the enemy without the gates only when the one within has been liquidated. I cannot discuss this ticklish question with my new interpreter because he does not speak any German and very little English. Moreover, he is not an approachable fellow, with the result that you never forget his slit eyes, as we unfortunately did now and then with his predecessor. In any case it looks as if we are on the point of completing our official tasks. I am already beginning to look forward to seeing you all again. After all I have lived through I long to hold you in my arms, my darling, you purest and best of all women.'

'You don't have to read it all to us,' said Old Malzahn. Stachwitz said:

'He probably didn't write all he wanted to say.'

The letter ended like the one before, in a whispering and a clattering of teacups.

III

As Christian Nadler turned off the highroad into the field path after delivering a pair of shoes to a customer, he was overtaken by a group of road-workers on their way home across the lake. To save the long walk to the station and the expense of the daily fare, the men had clubbed together and bought an old skiff which they moored at Christian's dock. One of them, named Wolpert, fell in step with Christian a slight distance behind the others.

'Look here, Nadler,' Wolpert said, 'you don't need to fasten the back door of your shack so tight tonight. No one'll harm you if he finds it open.'

Christian glanced sideways at Wolpert. He made no answer but Wolpert seemed to be satisfied. He went on:

'And if you were to leave a bit of ham in the shack, and it looks tomorrow morning as if the mice had nibbled it, don't worry about it.'

Wolpert then left Christian and hurried on to join the others. By the time Christian reached his boathouse the skiff, loaded with the men, was already crossing the lake. In the evening light he could see the line of the wake in the water. With the exception of Wolpert, who sat at the engine, the men were crowded close together. The light odour of petrol in the air quickly dissipated. The boat, speeding towards the shore with its burden, was merely a part of the evening

picture. But all sorts of thoughts that Wolpert had roused in Christian's mind kept on throbbing away like the motor which at that moment was shut off. Inside his hut Christian had a fine ham, wrapped in a linen bag, hanging from the rafters. He cut off one piece for himself and then an extra piece. He broke off a hunk of bread for himself and the remaining piece of bread, together with the ham, he stuffed into an empty jam-dish and carried them next door into that part of the shack where he kept his wood and all sorts of odds and ends. Then he fastened the inner bar to his workshop, and went out to eat his supper in the open doorway overlooking the dock. The trail left by the boat made a deeper furrow in the lake than any furrow on the land. Christian was tired from his walk. He stretched out and fell asleep – the best sort of vigilance on a night like this.

The next thing he knew someone was shaking him by the shoulder.

'This fellow sleeps like a top,' Wilhelm Nadler said.

'The village is surrounded too,' someone said.

Then someone else whistled between his teeth. Wilhelm swung round; a couple of young fellows came crashing in through the door. The shack rocked. Christian sat up. For a few seconds all the S.A. boys were tangled together in such a thick heap in the doorway between his bunk and the woodshed that he could not see what was in the middle of the pile. Then, with a shout, 'Watch your step!' his brother separated them. They dragged someone by the legs into the workshop, helping him along with kicks aimed at his head. Christian had swung his feet over the side of the bed; he stared down now at the face turned up to him, a human face unrecognizable because of the blood that covered it. Without thinking, Christian leaned over to shove two shoes that had fallen with a heavy thud under his bed. For a second his eyes came within a hand's breadth of the eyes in the bloodsmear'd face. Why that . . . that was Strobel . . . the boy he had often fed in the stable, fifteen years ago, when he was working for Wilhelm. And later he had had a job for a time in a furniture factory and had brought the whole village down on him because he was always sneaking around at election time distributing leaflets. Once he even put an election placard on Wilhelm's stable door. It was certainly Strobel who had jeered at Wilhelm when the S.A. drove through his village. Wilhelm always said that Strobel was the one who shot at him. When at last the S.A. had permission to make a house search, they had forced their way into his sister's house. But Strobel had fled, so they beat up his brother-in-law instead. However, Strobel had not given in. He had stolen impudently into

the village again; even during the last March election, when the S.A. were guarding every voting booth, he had once more pasted his red election placard on a barn door. Wilhelm had sworn: We'll get him. He had kept his oath. Why hadn't the fellow beaten it for the south? What did he think he could do here? Did he think he could win the farmers around the lake away from Hitler? He had kept on playing his tricks as if he did not give a hoot for Wilhelm and his whole gang till at last they got on his trail and encircled the whole lake region and all the villages – and the manhunt was on. Now there he lay, blood pouring from his mouth. He looked at Christian out of the corner of his eyes. He surely can't believe, Christian thought, that I sent for this gang? Aloud he said:

'Well, well, I've been asleep.'

'You certainly have,' said Wilhelm. He sat down on Strobel's chest.

'Hand me the wire, there!' What followed happened quickly: a piece of cobbler's wire twisted round the boy's feet, a cord fastened to a stone, the cord drawn through the wire, the boy dragged outside on the dock and a heavy splash.

'Now disperse and go home,' ordered Wilhelm. He lingered a moment. One could hear the S.A. boys on their way home over the fields singing at the top of their voices. 'Step on it,' Wilhelm said to the last boy. 'If anyone questions us: we're coming home from the parish fair in Stahnsdorf. Best thing would be for us all to take a quick run over there first. And you lie down and go to sleep again,' he said to Christian in the tone of an embarrassed grown-up. 'If anyone asks you any questions, you've been asleep, you haven't heard anything, you don't know anything. And don't forget – if you should happen to remember anything, you can just go and keep company with that little thug down there. There are stones enough here and there's still a whole roll of your cobbler's wire left.'

Christian stretched out on his folding cot. He heard Wilhelm whistling a tune with the boys outside as they went off along the highway towards Stahnsdorf.

The night was still. Moonlight shone through the open door. The bent metal on the shoemaker's last, the wheels of the sewing machine, the roll of cobbler's wire gleamed like silver. Christian lay motionless, his eyes staring straight at the roll of wire.

Strobel was certainly dead by this time. Christian would have liked to go out on the dock and poke around for him with the boat hook. But Wilhelm and his louts would be sure to turn round a couple of times and look at the door. They would come back if they saw him

poking about there. And that wouldn't help Strobel. He, Christian, could have prophesied just such an end for him long ago. You couldn't fool about with bulls like Wilhelm. When they get their hoofs on a man they trample him to death. That would just suit a diabolical fellow like Wilhelm. You despised Wilhelm, Strobel, because he has much less gumption than you. But he has more power, he has power over life and death.

How does he happen to have so much power? Where does he get it. What vermin gained anything by wrapping Strobel's legs with wire and weighting them with a stone? It was as if someone shook up a swarm of thoughts in Christian's head as one shakes feathers in a bedsack.

A few days later he met Wolpert peacefully cranking his motor in front of his shack. The road-worker waited, whistling. Wilhelm had warned Christian again in no uncertain terms just what would happen to him if he did not hold his tongue. Christian watched the cranking with the deepest interest as if he thought that boy, rotting away down at the bottom of the lake under the dock, could call out to the man as he drove off. He himself answered Wolpert's brief questions with: 'I slept like a log.'

The next morning he dragged his three-legged stool out under the projecting roof. There he was closer to the dead boy and he felt a certain comfort in this thought. By this time Strobel must have sunk so deep into the sand that there would be no sign of him, not even below the water. Yes, Strobel should have listened to Christian and kept as quiet as a mouse. He should have gone about his business and kept out of everyone's way, taking pains not to attract attention to himself. That was the only way one could get at those beasts.

However, there must be a fixed, immovable point somewhere in the world which was, after all, what it was. There must be two eyes somewhere watching all these goings-on in calm aloofness. Strobel could not simply be allowed to rot away down there on the bottom of the lake. All of a sudden, in this strange agitation that so disturbed him, Christian felt the need for telling someone the whole story. You couldn't just tie the truth to a stone and sink it. Surely there must be someone who could look down under the water, even under the sand at the bottom of the lake. If God could read one's heart, as people said, then he could also read the bottom of the lake; though it took sharper eyes for that than to read the heart by looking at a man's face.

Christian finished mending the pastor's shoes, tied them together

and flung them over his shoulder. After all, the pastor frequently had business with God – it was part of his job.

The pastor was sitting in his usual place under the portrait of Dr. Martin Luther. The eldest daughter laid a bunch of wallflowers on his writing table.

‘Well, what’s new, my dear Nadler?’ asked the pastor as Christian stood hesitating in the doorway with the old pair of shoes in his hand.

‘I’d like to ask the Herr Pastor something,’ said Christian.

‘Out with it, Christian,’ said the pastor.

‘There’s things going on nowadays,’ said Christian, ‘that a man on his own don’t rightly know how to cope with.’

He has had a quarrel with his brother, thought the pastor, recalling the village gossip about Christian and Liese. He thought, with a sort of pride, that after all it was his duty to help the villagers with good advice in human as well as spiritual affairs. To encourage Christian he said:

‘Don’t mince matters, my son. Anything you say here within these four walls goes no further.’

Thus encouraged, Christian launched into a recital of the events of the past night. When he came to the place where his brother sat on Strobel’s chest and called for a piece of wire, a strange expression came over the pastor’s face which at first Christian did not understand – a look of supplication rather than of outrage. He broke off to ask:

‘The Herr Pastor said that anything I say in this room is sure to go no further?’

The pastor replied quickly: ‘That’s right, Christian Nadler. And for that reason we must be careful not to say anything inside our four walls that we don’t have the courage to say to the whole world. We have no illusions about the secrets of the confessional. The murderer could commit God knows what fearful crime and then imagine the good God had forgiven him because he had confessed to a priest. We must proclaim the truth aloud in all places and before all men.’

Christian was so dumbfounded that, contrary to his usual habit, he looked the pastor straight in the face. The pastor lowered his eyes. With his hand on the door knob, Christian said:

‘Oh, about the boots, they don’t need to be mended all over. I’ll resole them in the places where they’re worn.’

‘That will be fine, my son,’ cried the pastor visibly relieved at the sudden end of the conversation.

On the way home Christian cursed himself for having yielded to an impulse simply because he could not rid himself of the dead boy's company under the porch roof. Of course, the pastor had been afraid Christian might tell him something that would cost him his position if he took any notice of it. The pastor had probably heard more than once of things like this. So he did what Wilhelm did with his debts; pretended to be stupid or, even better, put them so thoroughly out of his mind that he no longer believed in their existence.

The day was so warm that Christian was still sitting under the porch roof when the road-workers went home. As his glance fell on Wolpert, the thought came to him that here was a man who wasn't afraid of the truth. Or was he perhaps making a mistake again? Maybe the dead man down in the lake had driven him clean out of his senses. Perhaps he, Christian, had just got the fixed notion that he must not talk about things he could do nothing about. He signalled to Wolpert to come over, though he was annoyed with himself for doing so.

'Look, Wolpert,' he began, 'your Strobel didn't get away. The Nazis beat him to death. Wilhelm was with them. They flung him into the water. He's still lying down there behind the dock.'

Wolpert had leaned down over the three-legged stool. He straightened up, frowned, and his face turned white. Christian too suddenly turned pale. Wolpert looked absentmindedly over his comrades who were at that moment carefully getting into the skiff. Quietly he sized them up, running over all their various traits: how well they had kept themselves in hand since Hitler came to power; whether they were discreet or intelligent, cautious or timid; recalling certain remarks that now stuck to these people like signs as they crowded into the skiff's benches. He remembered remarks such as, 'Hitler seems to be a clever fellow after all', or 'I told you so long ago', or 'What can he do? Give to one what he steals from the other.'

'I'll have to think this over tonight,' said Wolpert, 'and see whether we can do anything. Whether we can find him; and how we can go about it. Meantime he has you to keep him company. He told me himself once: "Christian is sometimes quite a decent fellow."' He added, because Christian made a motion: 'He didn't exactly praise you to the skies, I wouldn't say that; he just said: "Christian is a fraud too; but somehow, somewhere, sometimes he is a little more decent than the other frauds."' That being the case he can put up with you a little while longer.'

Hans did not dare to go to the house where Emmi lived with her family. But his conscience kept pestering him to find out what had become of the girl. 'Go to her house,' it told him at night. 'I'm afraid,' he replied. To his mother he said:

'I suppose I ought to go up and ask how Emmi is?'

Marie was frightened: 'Why? Not when they would recognize you. You can't help her.'

Hans noticed that even his mother gave him wrong advice because she was afraid for him. Yet she was the one who had shown him the tiny manikin on the end of his bed; the little man who had nothing better to do than to keep watch on him day and night. But she, his mother, had a lot of worry with the whole family, and she was afraid.

One day Hans sat crowded between two S.A. men in a bus. One of them cried:

'Well, I never did! Why, there's Hans. Heil Hitler, my boy. What's become of you?'

Hans stared into the broad, red face of Fritz, the big boy who had charge of the children at the time of the attempted burglary.

'I've got work for the first time in six years. Come on, get off with me, boy, and I'll stand you a treat. Just think! Even my old man is joining us. At first he swore a lot, just as he always did at every change in the government. He had just about forgotten what it meant to believe anything good could ever happen. But when I came home with work he had to sit up and take notice. And now, because he is going to have work again too, his mind is at rest. Now he sees that Adolf Hitler is a very different sort of chap. And my mother has grown years younger since she got us men off her hands. Karl is away too. Not exactly at work, but he gets plenty to eat in his labour camp and he doesn't have to eat at home any more, either. It won't be long, they say, before there'll be work for him too. Emmi? No, she isn't at home any more. They put her in a reform school that time at government expense. They'll make a decent girl out of her yet. The new spirit rules everywhere now. Now we know why you children went to bits under the old system. We were on the right track when we stirred you up against that rotten old government. It doesn't hurt cheeky kids like Emmi to get a little rough handling. And when she comes out she'll realize the world has changed. There's an ice-cream shop boy. Come on! Get off

with me! You can't? You have to be somewhere at a certain time? Well, I've got to get off. Heil Hitler!

Hans could perfectly well have got off the bus too, but he much preferred his own company. On that bright morning, he felt in the crowded bus as if he were in a wood through which a bleak wind whistled. He had often heard of people in his own house talking just as Fritz had. Frau Melzer was always saying: 'Geschke, I think your Franz played the right card. Hitler's got something.' Even Tante Emilie, a silly woman, if the truth were known, could sometimes be heard saying nowadays: 'I always had a pretty good idea where your Franz was hanging out. But I must say he knew which side his bread was buttered.'

Franz, brisk and cheerful, now strutted around openly in a brown shirt. He had a way of slapping his father on the back.

'Now don't get into such a stew; just leave things to us young people for once.'

He had found a job in the Bock locomotive works, through the recommendation of an older comrade. To be sure, he had not been able to raise the money for an apprenticeship. However, he was being trained in his department; he earned money and was being sent to a night school. Hans had often pretended to be asleep in order to peep at his brother secretly and watch him carefully measure himself – his height, the breadth of his shoulders, the span of his arms, even his skull (he could not make that any bigger), and then jot down all the measurements, frowning as he did so. Franz's measurements had never come up to the requirements of the S.S. Nor was he taken into the police or any other branch post. And for this he held a grudge against his father, whom he blamed for his misfortune. Franz lived with his family and that family, examined officially, was none too good. His father had been a union member for years – there was no denying the fact. It was also his father's fault if Franz's physique was not perfect and he did not quite come up to the required measurements, since after all, his father had begotten him. Franz could only prove his trustworthiness by the reports concerning the attitude of his colleagues in the factory with which he furnished his Party regularly.

Hans could not even escape to the Youth Shelter any more. The Nazi government had clamped its seal on that door too. Gone were the things so dear to his heart: the Youth Shelter in which he had sometimes known hours of happiness; Emmi, to whom he had been devoted; his teacher, his favourite for years and years, had been transferred God knows where. The man named Martin was no more

than an incredible memory. His father was more morose than ever. His mother's eyes were still calm: he clung to her more than ever since the night when he had confessed his troubles to her. But what he craved for was joy, something strong, strange, and wild. One cannot live without joy. That was what that damned spider with four crooked legs, drawing great and small into the web, well knew. It crawled on the flag, on school blackboards, and on factory walls. Of course, it would have been fun to strut around with the Hitler Youth – outings, games and tussles instead of always standing on the sidelines as if one had the itch. It was dull never to run with the crowd and dance with them on all the holidays the city celebrated, but always to stand on the edge, as if you were a chimney-sweep. All about the gaily beflagged city wherever he looked Hans saw two narrow coal-black slits: the narrowed eyes of his lost friend. Ironical, sad, he stood looking at the boy, hands clasped behind his back. There on the placard Hitler watched him closely, with folded arms.

Hans walked past the house in the Alexandrinenstrasse where Martin had once lived. It was grey and empty; he wished with all his heart that Martin's face might be watching for him between the curtains. But the window was as empty as the house. He ran through a few streets, till he came to the place in the Walterstrasse where his sister now lived. Between this house in which Helene lived with her husband's family and the house in which the vanished Martin used to wait for him there was a connecting link. Hans was always glad to go to see his sister; in that house nothing had changed. Old Berger's nods signified: we two, you and I, we're old friends; and Oskar's mother, the long-legged Pole, much taller than her husband and her sons, nodded agreement with her crafty, bird's eyes. They had given up the best room to the eldest son and Helene who was expecting a child. Helene was gayer than Hans had ever known her at home. She had forgotten why she had been depressed before; in her new home she was in everyone's good books. With her father-in-law she provided for the family and also gave generously to anyone who asked for help. Her husband had part-time work; her young brother-in-law, Oskar, had managed to get out of the labour camp because a friendly doctor had worked a clever dodge for him; he still limped and walked with a cane, pretending to have an injured kneecap.

Ever since Geschke's sullen temper had driven all the neighbours away, the kitchen at home had been empty: Helene and her new family, on the contrary, kept their kitchen open to the entire house.

Here you could speak out frankly; here you felt safe. The new porter and his wife were the only untrustworthy people in the house. The Bergers were the real caretakers. Helene told stories about her invisible mending, and what went on in the realm of high S.S. officials. The merry wit she had suddenly developed kept the neighbours laughing every evening. Berger told how the men in his department cleverly wrecked repairs as soon as they were made and the very thing a 'trusty' Nazi had been sent there to prevent, so that in the end the blame fell on him. In this way everyone in Berger's kitchen felt he was doing his bit to put a spoke in Hitler's wheel. To judge from the mockery in the kitchen, Hitler might already have been outwitted and balked.

Hans preferred to hang about the Berger kitchen than at home. In Oskar, long-necked and heavy-eyed like his mother, he had a brother. Hans was continually excited and restless and was always trying to hide the fact. His friend was never excited or restless and had nothing to hide. The two boys would sit in Oskar's bedroom discussing all sorts of questions and making plans; plans that revolved round their future, in Oskar's case round trade schools and compulsory labour service, in Hans's about leaving school and the possibilities of being apprenticed to a trade. For only in the dark, in the bare and empty bedroom in which not even his friend could see the gleam in his eyes, did Hans indulge in his dreams of a job. At home he could certainly never wring enough money out of the part-time work his father had been given for him to learn to be a machinist. In the bedroom corner they agreed to take with them into the Hitler Youth, which they were now all obliged to join, a couple of their old friends from the Fichte group. The boys from the same quarter of the city would stick close together and meet here in the apartment at stated intervals. In their outfit there would be no arrests. They counted over the boys on whom they could rely. With them there would be no mishaps such as the grown-ups complained of: there would be no betrayals among them; none of them would suddenly go over to the Nazis, lured by promises of work, position and money. None of them would give his friends away for fear of being sent to prison. They were not afraid of hunger; nor did they fear for their wives and sons. That they could ever know such fear seemed as impossible as that their hair would turn white and their teeth fall out. Frau Berger called: 'What are you two doing up there in the dark?' She stuck her long neck into the bedroom and brought them a batch of potato pancakes.

The Geschkes were having their supper of pigs' trotters and

cabbage. Before he joined the Hitler Youth Movement, Franz had always kept any chance profit to himself. Now, without a murmur, he punctually handed over as much of his pay as the Hitler Youth considered appropriate. His group even boasted the motto: 'The German boy helps his family till he himself becomes the head of one.' Geschke chewed away at his pig's trotter as if it were the same poor stuff they had managed to get along on for the past years.

'Too little salt?' asked Marie. And she added: 'It's so hard to get anything good nowadays.'

Geschke flung the bone down on the floor. He had never done a thing like that before.

'What's come over you?' Marie asked.

Geschke forgot his determination to keep his thoughts to himself. Now he burst out: 'Well, they've kept their word. We've had a rise in pay; they did what they promised to do. They promised: do what we tell you and paste the spider in the middle of the red flag; then you'll eat pigs' trotters and sauerkraut even on weekdays.' He leaned over, picking up the bone from the kitchen floor: 'Into the garbage can with you. Where you belong! You still have fat on you, but I won't gnaw it off; let some dog have his fun with you.'

'You can use the extra pennies,' said Marie. 'You've earned them.'

'You're right. It's no favour; they owe it to me. And I'm not going to thank them for it, either. I'd have punched 'em in the jaw if they hadn't given me my due. You ought to have heard 'em praising Hitler this time for the rise in wages . . .'

'And what did you do?' asked Marie. 'Did you tell them what you've been telling me? No, you didn't do that or I wouldn't have needed to cook any pigs' trotters for you. You'd never have come home again. They'd have dragged you straight off to Oranienburg, because you didn't hang out the swastika flag on the first of May. They've probably shot Triebel by now.'

'That's right. It's a fact. I wouldn't like to go to the K.Z.' He covered his face with both hands. She took away the plate from between his elbows. It was time now to turn on the light in the kitchen. The light from the next door flat made a striped shadow of cross-bars over the empty kitchen table. Marie heard her son's steps on the stairs. It was not the eldest, but Hans. This evening he too was wearing a new shirt and a swastika on his sleeve. She turned a little pale. Geschke stared at the boy. In silence Marie heated his food for him. Geschke clasped his hands together on the table as if in prayer. He thought: 'First they took the eldest, now they're taking this boy away from me.' He looked up briefly from his clasped hands into the

boy's face. In a sudden access of rage he thought: 'What do I care about him anyway? He's not my own flesh and blood; I've got troubles enough.' The boy emptied his plate without tasting what he ate. He had noticed the expression of disgust with which his father had looked at him. As a rule Hans had secretly despised his father because he was such a 'yes-man' and never made any effort to help himself. Now for the first time the boy felt something almost like respect because Geschke despised him for wearing the swastika. He struggled with himself: should he take his father aside and explain everything to him? But then he remembered the pledge the boys had given each other. He himself had insisted on it: a chance remark from his father, a neighbour's gossip could ruin everything.

Geschke thought: 'I took her in that time with her young face and her soft breasts and her child. It didn't get me anything. That man's son is like my own. Just one worry more.' It troubled Hans not to be able to tell his father about the decision that would have aroused their mutual respect. Keeping quiet was harder for him than anything else. As he chewed the bone slowly he thought to himself that his friends probably had to put up with the same sort of glances from their fathers and friends.

Geschke turned his eyes away from the boy. His heart was heavy with pain and remorse. He was not exactly sure what he had to be remorseful about. He had been guilty of no crime, no cowardice. Even during the March election, when the Nazis kept their sharp eyes on all voters, Geschke had voted as usual. He had been ready to meet any demand; to pay money or shed his blood or shoulder a gun. In the end he had not been called upon to make any sacrifice. Then why the remorse? Where had he failed? Triebel had once shouted at him: 'You with your God-damned submissiveness!' He felt no guilt at the thought that he had obeyed the orders of his management. While he was still a boy at school his father had always impressed on him that he must obey orders, even if he landed in the reformatory as a result. Even if they had not taken his father to the house of correction they had taken him to prison. In those days obeying the orders of the management had often resulted in many complications. At other times obeying orders had brought good results. He himself had been given temporary jobs several times through their intervention at the Labour Bureau. But after all the advantages had not been so very great. Now the management was no longer in control of any posts, just as Triebel had told him, sneering. His former masters were in the K.Z. While Marie quietly washed her dishes, now and then casting a glance at

the boy sitting there as silent as the man, Geschke mentally ran through all the names, ideas, countries and events that were running through the minds of statesmen and leaders all over the world. He saw faces he knew only from their pictures or as he himself had glimpsed them from a distance. He saw his little cashier – what had happened to him? Had he been locked up too? – and Ebert, the President, dead a long time now, and Hindenburg, and his own eldest boy, not wearing the Brown Shirt, but as he was last year when Geschke had whipped him. He saw Rosa Luxembourg's coffin and himself marching behind it and Wuels who spoke for the last time in the Lustgarten. He saw sections of countryside and roads in sunshine and rain, as one sees them in the news or the cinema or at the hour of one's death. He saw a little bit of the Soviet Union, a little bit of Charkow in the time of famine, with children as thin as rails; part of an athletic meeting in the Red Square, where everyone looked happy. Photographs and newspaper cuttings whirled round in his head, scraps from *Vorwärts* and from the *Arbeiter-Illustrierten*, both of them forbidden. He could reproach himself for one thing only: that he had not believed sufficiently in everything. But one cannot force oneself to believe, so one cannot regret that either. That was why he did not feel any of the relief of true repentance. His heart merely felt heavier and heavier.

When his head had cleared a little, he took his hands from his face and laid them in front of him. His worry had contributed as little to straightening out the world as all the deliberations and the conferences of all the ministers put together. He was just as incapable as they of deciding the most disturbing questions. He even went a step beyond them – he kept silent. At last he got up and, without even saying 'Good-night', went off to bed. From this time on, Geschke seldom ever spoke; he was even more laconic and morose than he had been after the death of his first wife.

At Easter, Hans had an unexpected pleasure. Instead of going to her new family as usual, his sister Helene suddenly appeared at the flat after work.

'Now Hans has finished school; he must learn a trade. I've brought the money with me so that you can sign the agreements.'

Marie stared at her stepdaughter just as if she had not seen this girl grow up, or rather as if she were a superhuman being who dropped from the clouds into Marie's kitchen. She knew very well that the boy longed to learn the machinist's trade. But, given the family's circumstances, this longing was as likely to be fulfilled as a

trip to the moon. During the past weeks she had felt more intensely than ever the strange and to her incomprehensible wall that separates men and women from their desires. With her son she was immured in a predestined existence that no longing and no talents could break; shut in like a prisoner in his cell, except that the solitary cell was not a room, but narrow, tortuous passages, enclosed by high walls, from her home to the grave. Helene's offer was the key to a little side exit from that passage. Now Hans would not have to go to night school with a beginner's job which the Nazis offered him. Such a job would be as a helper and farmhand or perhaps in a factory where, most of all, the Nazis needed cheap labour. Being untrained, the most he could have hoped for was an occasional rise in his pay.

You were right, Mother, in your dreams! Your son was born for better things. You did not weep and lie in vain when you fought for a chance to bring him into the world. In those days the world you pictured was not the dark, walled-in passage you know today. Your dreams were not mistaken; you were right. True, your son will never be a great man, though you are naturally right in feeling that he is born to something special. The world will never again be so open to opportunity as you hope, but it will not be a cell. He will never be a man of great importance, but he will not exactly be like everyone else. He will be a machinist; he can be an outstanding machinist among all the machinists in the world.

Helene answered all questions:

'You know I've always had a weakness for Hans. And after all my brother is closer to me than my young brother-in-law. My father-in-law wants to put Oskar in his department where he will be taught the trade and start earning money straight away. Heiner, my husband, now has a full-time job; my baby gets a small allowance, so that gives me a chance to help Hans to learn a trade out of my own earnings.

Marie merely said:

'Helene, have a sausage! Eat it! Do have dinner for once at home with us, Helene!'

Twelve

I

THE THREE BOYS leaning over the railing at the Moeckern Bridge wore the same white shirts and the same swastika band that all young boys were wearing these days. From their backs one could not tell what they were arguing about. Hans stood on the right listening to the others. From the alert expression on his face it was obvious what he was about to intervene. Oskar, with his long neck and his protruding eyes, looked so sleepy no one would have thought he could speak so sharply. Max Groh, the smallest of the three, munched away at an apple as if the whole business were no concern of his, though actually he was the cause of the quarrel.

'For the last time,' Oskar was saying, 'Are you going to join our group, or aren't you?'

'I've already told you,' said Max, 'I can't.'

'Thought you weren't afraid of responsibility?' growled Oskar.

Groh tossed the apple core into the water. 'I'm not afraid of anything,' he shouted.

'All right, then,' said Oskar. 'Tell us why. When you turn down a thing like that you must have a reason.'

The boys were proud of having preserved, as they had planned, the closed core within their Hitler Youth Group. They never curried favour with a Youth Leader. Carefully, every month, they sent a representative from each district to Berger's apartment. They gave out watchwords, Party Slogans, and settled ticklish problems. Surreptitiously they exchanged forbidden books. They drew up a pamphlet condemning labour camps. There had been three ringleaders: Hans, Oskar, and another boy who was older and studying printing. He came from a family that was under police surveillance. But the police had sent the boy to a labour camp to get him away from the influence of his own people and the two boys had had bad luck with their next candidate.

This candidate was a certain Berthold who had read more than other boys of his age. In their evening together there was nothing he could not explain, just like a schoolmaster, from Darwin to dialectics, from the Ice Age to surplus value shares. He could lay traps for the Hitler Youth with apparently harmless questions

better than anyone else, or make them sweat blood till his aly questions rebounded on himself. He soon grew so used to his game of cross-questioning that he got a great kick out of questioning everything. 'Not in one thing,' he would say, 'were the Nazis right'; 'Jews aren't like other people after all.' And he could prove to you, with equal ease, why they were like or unlike everyone else. At other times he would admit, hesitatingly, that he himself had been uncertain about many things. Everyone knew, of course, that there were various strains among animals, and if among animals why not among human beings? And if there were different strains among human beings why not superior and inferior ones? Perhaps the mere fact that the people of the north had been able to survive the Ice Age had really made them a superior race. If the Germans were the best of all these northern peoples, then there would also be a few people in the best race who were superior to others. The boys began to fear that this Berthold would report their secret group to the Nazis!

When Hans and Oskar looked around for someone to take his place their choice fell on Groh. He had honest eyes: he was not imaginative, but he was dependable. They were disappointed when he refused. To their dismay they now discovered that they had not enough members to keep on finding substitutes among them.

They gazed down at the apple barge loaded with fruit for market. Great mounds of golden apples, piled on deck, shone as if the pale afternoon light had finally come to rest on the sluggish waterway. The glint of the golden apples found an answering gleam in the eyes of the young boy who leaned far over the railing. The light moved from the barge to the iron frame of a crane in the lumber yard on the opposite bank; it swept from apples and crane and windows behind the lumber yard over the heart of the young boy, as if it had the power to illumine not only remote places, but also vague and remote feelings. Groh thought: 'Now how did that man Steinmetz on our street know they were going to ask me to do something? How does he happen to know everything we do?' Groh forgot that he himself had told his mother yesterday, that Steinmetz was only guessing at things and was just keeping a sharp watch on him; that he could read the answer from the expression on his face just the way you could in the childish game 'Hot or Cold'. A boy can run away from a man quicker, but he is also quicker to blush. Groh had not always been as clever as he thought.

'The attendant at the filling station next to us is an out-and-out

Nazi,' he said. 'He's suspicious of my mother. My mother, you know, does very important things. Even more important than we do.'

'There's a Nazi living in every block of houses and every family is being watched,' said Oskar. 'That's why our work never ends.'

'I only meant,' Groh explained, 'there's no sense in getting ourselves into trouble just because the Nazis are spying on us.' His face looked half youthful, half old and tormented.

So far Hans had kept quiet. He had stood there, his attention fixed on the crane as it scooped up mud with its long arm, flung it off behind and scooped up more mud again. The arm pointed upwards as the signal to stop work was given. And even as the first group of workmen were leaving the lumberyard on their way home, the crane scooped up its portion of mud and deposited it as deliberately and precisely as if it were a gigantic, trained animal. Hans was clever at imitating not only the motions of men and animals, but also of machines. He watched, frowning, the last movements of the crane as he puzzled over the arguments of his two friends. The noise at the yard had stopped. The elevated trains whistled. More and more people began streaming homeward over the bridges, their brown and black shirts fading into the dusky twilight.

Hans said: 'You can't force him to do something he doesn't want to do.'

'He ought to think it over,' said Oskar.

Again the thought occurred to Groh: 'How strange that this man Steinmetz knew all about it. Perhaps someone has betrayed us - this Berthold, for instance!' The lights on the arches of the bridge came on. By this time the light in the sky had disappeared from all but one window that glistened somewhere behind the yard under the roof of the cement factory. It was not the lights flaring up on bridges, on water and in the streets, but the last unnoticed rays of the faint evening light touching a garret window that stole into Groh's heart. He thought: 'They're already beginning to doubt me.'

'Now make up your mind: yes or no,' Oskar said firmly.

'I've already told you - no.' And again Groh thought: 'Steinmetz certainly knew something, whether through someone's carelessness or betrayal, it came to the same thing.' He said so loud that a passer-by heard him: 'Heil Hitler!' Then he rushed angrily down the subway stairs.

For a minute the place between the two boys at the railing remained empty. Then they drew close together. The restaurant

behind the Moerkern Bridge was brilliantly lighted, and circles and letters of illuminated advertising swept over stone walls and over the rectangle of pavement and sky between the walls. The two boys stared silently into the red and green mottled water. Hans discovered the reflection of a couple of stars between the gaily-coloured speckled lights. He flung back his head to pick out the starry reflection again in the equally colourful, equally dappled sky. Suddenly he thought of the hunchback who knew the names of the stars better than anyone else at the Fichte camp. Such funny names – Cassiopeia, Orion. The boy had had a funny name too: Rappaport. Where was he now? The whole family had moved to another part of the city when the Nazis started wrecking Jewish shops. They had not had enough money to leave the country, not even to go to Prague or to Paris; certainly not to Palestine as the Nazis were always shouting. For that was the longest and most expensive of journeys. So they just moved to another part of the city where there were more Jews. Perhaps it comforted them, Hans thought, to be beaten up with all the others in the same street, instead of alone here among Christians. At his request Marie had hidden the little hunchback on her balcony and locked him in. He had crouched there, crooked and smaller than ever behind the flower boxes, till the main uproar subsided. And when they had opened the door for him at night, he had taken a good look at the stars just as he used to in the Fichte camp. Hans suddenly felt very sad as if the sadness came from deep within him.

Oskar stared down so hard at the water it looked as if his bulging eyes would fall into it. He was sorry now that Max Groh had gone off in a huff. Whatever his reasons, there was no doubt about his loyalty.

'Who'll we take now in his place?' he asked.

Hans shrugged his shoulders.

As they went down the subway steps, there stood Groh in front of an automatic machine. Groh was searching the passing crowd, reflected in the window, for the two Hitler Youths he was waiting for. He was trying to decide what he should take: burnt almonds or bonbons. If he did not have a chance to make it up with the two boys that evening, the break, he knew, would be final. They would always be suspicious of him. He would not muster up the courage to convince them of a better reason. And that would breed mistrust among the boys who were still decent: he would be left alone. Groh's father had died many years ago. He lived alone with his mother who was cashier in a store. She was a plump, thoughtful

little woman: to look at her no one would think she lived constantly under the shadow of death. The branch store, in which she worked, had become the meeting-place for a number of men and women to whom she slipped instructions written out on their checks. At night when she went to bed with the boy she summoned what strength she had left to explain to him clearly the things he should know in order to remain what she called decent: the tricks the Nazis had used to get into power and stay in power and what was being done to fight against them. Constantly expecting to be arrested, exhausted and ignorant, she tried to explain everything to him in one night: the whole world order, the reconstruction of the government, the difference between rich and poor. Her strength was slight, the strength of an overworked widow. Even if the boy stayed decent, it could only result in sorrow. They could refuse to allow her the right to bring him up; things like that were happening every day now. They could lock him up or kill him.

'It's mother's fault,' thought little Groh. 'She advised me to be careful. And that's just what I don't dare tell them. Then they'd be sure to mistrust a fellow who told his mother everything. What shall I do now?'

He gave a start as he recognized Oskar and Hans in the window. He decided quickly on burnt almonds.

As they went on down the steps Hans said: 'We ought to try again with him. I think he's a decent fellow.' The sight of Groh and his thick forelock suddenly gave him a strong feeling of fraternity. He remembered all the years they had fought and played together; Groh meant more to him than Oskar who was indolent and sleepy. Hans felt that one must not lightly relinquish such a companion.

He said: 'We can ask him if he'll go with us to paste leaflets tonight.'

'If my brother doesn't object,' said Oskar. 'Why do you bother so much about him?'

'There aren't many of us now,' Hans replied. 'I sort of like him.'

He put his hand on Groh's shoulder. Groh raised his brown eyes, so like a faithful dog's, and looked at him earnestly.

'Will you help us put up placards tonight, Groh?'

'Sure!' Groh answered happily.

The boys sat down together side by side on the subway bench. They munched Groh's burnt almonds, and laughed and joked as gaily as if Hitler could look on in annoyance because, in spite of all the tricks with which he had managed to split the whole country apart, he had failed to separate these three boys.

At home in Marie's kitchen, Hitler had had more luck. As Hans ran up the stairs he could hear the unmistakable rowdy noises that betokened the presence of his brother and his friends. The S.A. boys, who sat round the kitchen table, had a different way of drinking their coffee, of laughing, even of swearing from the people who usually sat at Geschke's kitchen table. At Franz's bidding Marie filled her coffee pot a second time. Geschke sat in his usual place in front of the window overlooking the street.

'My father,' Franz said, 'hasn't got used to the fact that he doesn't have to drink malt day in and day out.'

His best friend, Schlueter, taller than Franz but not so thin, a huge fellow with a rough baby face, got up and, carrying his own coffee cup, went over and stood beside Geschke at the window sill. He said in a voice as good-natured as his face:

'Come on, have some, Herr Geschke. You can allow yourself that pleasure now: a man needs something like this. Things are different now: almost all of us here work nowadays.'

Franz had often told him that Geschke was still mourning for the old leaders who were rotting away in concentration camps. Schlueter was expert at talking to all sorts of men in all sorts of places—it was part of his job.

'Herr Schlueter, congratulations!' Geschke answered in a tone that was not so sullen as usual; 'I didn't know you were one of the directors!'

Every head at the table turned towards him.

'What d'you mean by that?'

'Because you've got work for almost all of us. You say so yourself, Schlueter. That order could only come from the top. You must have influence.'

Schlueter controlled his temper. He had often been praised for his ability to present his ideas in all sorts of places. Now he said quietly, good-naturedly:

'No, no, I'm an ordinary member. I'm proud of it. I haven't learned nearly enough, I don't know nearly enough to sit in on the conferences of the higher-ups. To be director of such a vast enterprise means heavy responsibility; unfortunately, I'm not up to that.'

At the table the S.A. boys thought: 'Schlueter's doing his stuff.'

Geschke said: 'Yes, so much responsibility must be a burden. The stuff I load on my truck every morning is not to be compared with it. A load like that is the director's responsibility. Now tell me, Schlueter, how does a director come to learn so much?'

Schlueter answered calmly: 'He goes through a lot of training for years, he studies day and night so that later on he can turn everything to the best account for us.'

Geschke said just as calmly: 'I'd like to have done that.'

'You can still learn a lot, and your sons too, at night schools. You can win in the vocational contests; you can even go to the Hitler training school. No talent is overlooked these days. No ability goes unnoticed.'

He sat down at the table. He was as pleased as a man who has successfully passed a cross-examination. Schlueter had spoken from his heart. For years he had wandered about with his great hulking body and his giant's strength, useless, unable to find a job. Now his great strength was being utilized. At home no one had missed him. His mother had had too many sons, his teacher too many pupils, the magistrate too many unemployed. It was better to be too sharply watched in the S.A. than not to be noticed at all.

Then it occurred to him that, in his zeal, he had forgotten the most important part. He turned round again and said: 'Of course, the main thing is natural ability.'

'Of course,' replied Geschke, 'only how do you get it?'

'Oh come now! You're not so old that you've forgotten how it's done. And when we have attended to it in our own race then the vocational guidance bureau sees to it later on that the right man does the right thing.'

'Of course,' replied Geschke. 'Only, what if you get ten natural born contractors? When you're begetting a child, you don't have your mind on its vocation. Now, for example, with the new stadium that's to be built, they need a thousand new masons and only one single contractor. What happens then to the nine who aren't needed?'

'That's up to the vocational guidance bureau,' said Schlueter. 'You really worry far too much about things, Herr Geschke. Your thoughts churn around inside you almost like a soapbox orator's. After all, everyone knows that at times, each of us has to sacrifice something for the sake of the majority.'

'Of course,' said Geschke. He thought it best to keep his mouth shut. Suddenly he felt all eyes at the table turned towards him, no longer in amusement, not even sarcastically, but fiercely, menacingly. His own Franz's eyes were on him, perhaps in warning. Meanwhile Hans ate his bread and butter standing. 'I'll be back later,' he said. 'Don't wait for me.'

Marie cleared the empty teacups from the table. She did not ask

any questions. Not only today, but all her days, good and bad, with their wealth of love and suffering, ended into that phrase: 'Don't wait for me.'

Hans met his friend Groh at the subway exit. Little Groh had left a note at home for his mother: 'Don't wait for me. I'll be late.' Apart from the prospect of an adventure both boys were glad to spend an evening at the Bergers. They were proud and pleased when the older son led them from the kitchen into his bedroom, for that meant going from the arena of gossip, and jokes to the place where great decisions were made. They've taken me back, thought Groh, when Heiner checked off the boys: he, himself, and Groh would work together and his brother and Hans. As Heiner went on to describe the street which was to be strewn with leaflets, the street which for the coming night would serve as the borderline between life and death, young Groh thought quite happily: 'They're taking me on again; they're putting me to the test.'

The tramcar ran behind the huge furniture factory of Bornheim & Sons. How light the moonless sky was, how bright the night! Like little lanterns the bone buttons on Heiner's jacket glistened absurdly; lamplight streamed through into parted curtains; the street was dotted with lights. They gave a hasty glance into a cavern of a bar from which issued much S.A. roaring and howling. They passed a couple of policemen. The street behind Bornheim & Sons was empty. Oskar and Hans turned the corner. The last thing Hans saw, before the night swallowed them, was Oskar's sidelong glance out of his bulbous eyes. They put up their posters spaced at distances already arranged. Passers-by paid attention neither to the two boys nor to the few posters they had already put up. A bunch of S.A. men came out of the bar roaring drunk. Not till morning when it was light, would their few posters attract attention among the many placards and appeals. Then the words could sink into the brain and spread from mind to mind, from one part of the city to another. At the moment those words were nothing but strips of paper and sticky fingers and pounding hearts.

The boys waited for Heiner and Groh at the station. They had the longer route. Oskar still had an unbroken roll of burnt almonds in his pocket and they munched away at them—their fingertips tasted of glue. They heard the roar of the machines in the factory, the sound of footsteps, of doors banging, of someone whistling. Somewhere a woman screamed. From the bar opposite came the tinkle of the automatic piano. They heard the rush of motor-cars and a gunshot. They let the night bus go by. Before the next bus

came along, the two they had been waiting for turned the corner. At first it looked as though Heiner had his arm around little Groh; they approached slowly. Oskar peered anxiously at his brother: Heiner was leaning heavily on Groh, his face was contorted with pain. The boys helped him into the bus. Fortunately, there were only a few passengers. The boys settled Heiner in one corner, then stood in front of him to hide him from the passengers.

'They shouted,' Groh explained, 'and we started to run. They shot at us and I think he got hit.'

At their stop Heiner fell out of the bus. Groh clung to his coat and Oskar caught him. Groh rode on farther; Heiner walked between Oskar and Hans, who carried rather than supported him, peering anxiously into his face.

Helene was awake and was nursing her baby. Her first reaction was joyful relief at seeing her husband home again. Holding her child to her breast, she listened to their story of the evening. And at once she began giving them directions: they must put Heiner flat on his back, take off his shoes, run for the doctor. The latter was the dependable one who had worked the successful trick for Oskar about his kneecap. Helene stared in terror as Heiner tried vainly to say something, as he tried to smile but could not bring it off. Then his glance wandered to her breast only to look straight through her into an unfathomable distance. He frowned slightly, as if his wife's breast blocked his view.

Marie lay beside Geschke, her arms crossed behind her head. The last subway train had passed. If Hans were coming at all, he would soon be here. The light in the bar across the way went out; now there was only a ray of light along the bedcover, shining from the street lamp into the bedroom.

Marie heard the boys under the windows; she heard the house door shut, then quick steps coming upstairs. She slipped into the kitchen.

'Have some hot coffee.'

'Why are you still awake?' he asked and added, as if it were a comfort, 'there's no sense in waiting up for me. After all, I might not come back some day.'

'I have no one but you,' Marie said.

'You told me yourself whom I must always follow . . . the one who always gives me the right advice, the one who always has time for me because he has nothing else to do, the one who is always with me, who always tells me the truth, because he is never afraid. Do

you remember what you told me that time I had very nearly stolen something from the meat market? We were both afraid of the police. Do you remember? You certainly don't want me to forget what you taught me then.' He drank the coffee and yawned. He thought to himself: 'It is better to say nothing about the accident.' After all, his sister's husband might come out of it all right.

Marie sat a little longer with him at the kitchen table. When he first came in tonight she had been as happy as if he had come home for good. Now she felt a chill shadow, an inexplicable presentiment. Hans got into his brother's bed and soon both boys were fast asleep.

II

Whenever Christian Nadler moved out under the porch roof he always looked over at his brother's field till he found the object in which he was most interested: first, the pale, almost white head of the middle son and then Liese's yellow head of hair. The latter stirred him more to anger than pleasure. He couldn't help being excited by the sight of her. But he had not the slightest desire to make life any more difficult for himself on that account. What troubled him now was a very different matter. He was sorry for Liese. He never would have believed that anything could rouse his pity, least of all such a sturdy wench. The hardest blows, the most loathsome tasks, made no more impression on that broad indestructible body of hers, covered with freckles as far as her breast, than a cold in the head. He felt sorry that plump, jolly, unsuspecting Liese had to sleep night after night with that devil of a Wilhelm. She had married him and she worked in his fields, milked his cows and reared his children. But even if she often made Christian angry enough to kill her, the poor woman certainly did not deserve such a brute as Wilhelm.

Christian tossed aside a peasant's clog and picked up one of the pastor's shoes. That needed only to be patched, for the pastor was parsimonious and could never make up his mind to have new soles put on his shoes till Christian pointed out to him that such repairs were unavoidable.

'Now can't that silly female stay away from me! She's alone for the moment and here she comes. She knows by this time that people are always watching us from the opposite shore and from the boats.' As he heard her firm, light footstep he thought as a rule he never worried about fancies: 'If we could both live here in this shack of mine, she'd be coming now from work straight to my

house. We could be man and wife before God and mankind. And she could say out loud, in front of everyone: "My dear Christian."

'My dear Christian,' said Liese, 'you might nail my heels on for a change instead of some stranger's.'

He did not even look up. She was carrying a run-over heel in her hand. Now she slipped her foot out of the damaged shoe. Without turning his head, he put aside the pastor's boot and slipped her shoe, still warm inside, over his hand.

'Now just when I'm all alone,' said Liese, 'I've had such bad luck.'

'Where are the others?'

'Today is the big country fair in Kohlhasenbrueck.' Her voice dripped honey. 'The head of the farmers group is coming; and the schools are invited too. The youngest boy has to present a bouquet of flowers.'

'Well, why not,' said Christian.

'No reason at all,' said Liese. 'Only I thought Ziesen's grandchild would be the one to do that. People do say he made a lucky sale to the Prussian government. He couldn't even pay the taxes on his estate any more and they say he sold the whole place to the government for a lot of money and they've taken it over as their domain. For something like that a farmer leader deserves a bouquet of flowers.'

'No, no; the domain is to be divided among the people who are in dire poverty and have so little land that it no longer pays to pull them out of the gutter.'

'They get the land on lease from the domain and they give workshops to shoemakers and bakers and people like that.'

'What? All poor people?'

'Well, there's not room enough for that. They pick out one poor family from every village round about.'

'Are they going to choose you people?'

'Christian dear! Are you crazy? We're not hard up; we're almost estate owners. And if Wilhelm gets the stripes he's counting on, then we'll be having a nice tight little income.'

Christian thought: 'What sort of a stripe does he need now to make him happy?'

Liese was standing behind Christian, one shoe off and one shoe on. She looked down on his head which was almost bald. 'What was it I liked so much about this fellow?' she thought. Pretending not to hear his last question, she cried gaily: 'The good God finally helped us. There were times when we were almost in despair. Now

nothing more can happen to us. They don't dare to slap a mortgage on us nowadays.'

'Just leave God out of it, please,' said Christian. He had purposely avoided looking her in the face till the last moment. Now he could no longer avoid doing so. She had seated herself on the ground in front of him to pull on her shoe. Her eyes were as clear and shining as marbles. Christian stared down at the pastor's boot which he had started to work on again. His thought turned more swiftly from Liese to eternity, than his pastor could have wished. Only that pastor, with his fear of the men in power, had thoroughly spoiled everything for him.

That was the private sequel to those events in his shrivelled heart. But there was also a public sequel in broad daylight. Wolpert, to whom Christian had confided that the boy had failed to get away, and now lay only a few yards away at the bottom of the lake, was wondering how he could bring the truth to light without endangering Christian's life. He did not dare confide in his fellow workers. Finally he poked about under the landing with a long pole; to all appearances in an effort to float the boat, actually in the hope of stumbling on the body. In that case he would have to put up a strong show of outrage and could have given the Nazis a pretty fright. But his pole did not catch anything, perhaps because he was poking in the wrong spot or because the corpse already lay buried too deep in the sand.

Someone from the opposite shore had noticed this performance and began puzzling it over. One day, when Christian came back from his customers in the village, he found a regular S.A. camp set up in front of his hut. 'That's going to be just grand,' he thought. As he limped slowly towards them, he flung his brother a sidelong, imploring glance. When he saw Christian's expression Wilhelm thought: 'What a miserable wretch he is!'

'Come on over here, you!' he called. On the landing, just hauled out of the water lay a slippery, dripping object that looked more like a huge spoiled fish than the remains of a human being. Wilhelm drew down the corners of his mouth and glanced about him. 'Now you can see,' his glance said, 'how a poor wretch like that has to swallow everything in the end.' Aloud he said: 'By the way, someone reported that there had been a fight here between some workmen over a difference in political opinions. So we've come to investigate. Must have been a sort of secret court-martial, you understand, Christian. Probably against one of those poor fellows who had joined us.'

His laughing eyes looked straight into Christian's. Christian stared stupidly at him.

'Yes, of course, I understand,' said Christian.

A few days later the watery corpse was buried. Someone even made a speech. Quarrels between workmen, like this one which had cost the poor fellow his life, were long since things of the past. The nation was now one solid united block; no more class distinctions; no more discord.

That evening Wolpert was not among the road-workers when they went home. Christian asked what had become of him. He was told briefly: 'Concentration camp.' 'And he never once said a word about me,' Christian thought. 'He must have wanted to show me how decent he was.'

But as far as his own decency was concerned, Christian had no desire to end the way Wolpert had. Nevertheless, as he sat on his three-legged stool beneath the porch roof, he felt proud that he was connected with men like Wolpert by a thin, fragile thread of decency.

III

Though Lieven now had enough money to spend his holidays anywhere he chose and in any feminine company he desired, he boarded the fussy little local train to Olmuetz to visit his Cousin Otto. That night, when he stood before the garden gate, he knew at once why he had come; it was the only spot on earth where a barking dog and a light welcomed him. Otto Lieven opened the door himself; he showed his guest to his own room. The bed had not been touched; a couple of opened books, a few papers scattered about, showed that the owner had spent a restless night.

'I work so hard all day long that I hope at night I can finally get some sleep. I thrash around for a few hours; I get up; I write and read. Sit down, my dear fellow. Let's have something to drink. We can be glad we are together. We can open our hearts to one another.'

Ernst Lieven said, smiling: "I'll gladly drink with you, but I have nothing to confide."

'Well, have you come to any decision? Have you digested all that has taken place?'

'I don't know what sort of a decision you expected me to make. What has happened in the last weeks that I ought to digest?'

The older man looked at him with narrowed eyes as if he were

sitting so far off that he could recognize him only with difficulty. His own face was so sunburned that his hair was lighter than his skin. The bumps on his forehead and cheek bones and the aquiline nose lent his face an appearance of sternness; the mouth showed a certain weakness. He brought out a half-filled bottle and two glasses. Ernst Lieven laughed and said: 'Now at last, you're offering me what I missed when I visited you before.'

Both men drank hastily. The elder Lieven said: 'You ask me what has been going on. Well, for instance a couple of people on whom we had set our hopes have been murdered.'

'Who do you mean by we? What sort of hopes? Anyhow, people on whom someone's set their hopes get killed in wartime too, don't forget.'

Otto Lieven pushed aside the shade of his writing table lamp. Whether it was the bright light or the sharp Kummel, both men felt as if they were passengers in a train, who had made a long journey together.

'They weren't killed,' said the elder man. 'They were murdered.'

'They had to be shot because they were holding up progress.'

'What sort of progress did they hold up, in your opinion?'

'What sort of progress? You ask the same questions as your sister Elisabeth. By the way, I had no idea we were going to meet here again. I saw her coat as I came in, as usual, in a ridiculous place: hanging on a doorknob, I think. As if she had sworn never to use clothes hangers.'

His cousin looked at him closely. He repeated: 'What sort of progress was that in your opinion?'

'I took great pains to explain all that to your sister some time ago. You explained National Socialism to me here at a time when I still thought it was a new German invention, some sort of a new Party twist. Do you want me to explain to you now what it means.'

'No, that's not necessary. Elisabeth has told me everything you told her, not so well perhaps, because you yourself didn't know as much about it then as you do now. For example you told her that if she wants to go back to our estate and if you're never to work at shabby, poorly paid jobs again, she must have confidence in the government which understands what the people want. She must overlook details like poor pictures and vulgar songs. You will probably tell her the same thing now; she must overlook trifles if she wants to see her estate again. Poor pictures, vulgar songs and a few murders. Only, in the meantime, they have probably taught you to express everything more cautiously.'

'You're going rather far. What is it you are trying to say?'

'That our family estate which my sister is supposed to see again if she overlooks a few details is a very modest affair compared to the estate on which you lived when you came back to Upper Silesia. How much must one overlook there? Nowadays there is much talk and much writing about blood and race and things like that which raise our people above all other people. I think we two Lievens know how to evaluate such words. They are part and parcel of us; we cannot shake them off; we ourselves can still remember how a Fuehrer becomes a Fuehrer and a following a following.'

Ernst Lieven said drily: 'Oh yes, six hundred and fifty years ago I can remember we drove a Grand Duke over the ice in a sled made of our shields.'

'There is no virtue you fellows don't suspect like a shot before anyone can cast suspicion on you.'

His cousin's face had turned pale under the skin as deeply sunburned faces do. In sharp contrast, Lieven's own was almost gentle, except for the determined mouth.

'It's probably nothing to you,' Otto Lieven said, 'if Hitler promulgates a couple of principles: call them socialism or whatever you will. Principles mean nothing to you. You don't even believe in Hitler. You believe in power because you are the richer for a little of it.'

Ernst Lieven stood up. He said: 'I did not come here with bad intentions. I had no idea you would start worrying me about principles on the first evening of my holiday.'

The elder man looked at him, nodded and said: 'Don't go yet. Finish your drink. I suppose I live too much alone and my heart is far too full. I fell upon the first man at hand and that happened to be you. I did not mean to spoil your first evening. Forgive me.'

The next morning Lieven met his cousin Elisabeth at breakfast. Otto had gone out to the field long before. The breakfast of black bread, butter, honey, eggs and corn coffee was set out on the enormous six-legged wooden table at one end of the kitchen which could be curtained off from the hearth. The curtain, the tablecloth and the apron of the fat and jolly peasant woman who looked after the housekeeping were all made of the same patterned red woven material. Elisabeth said: 'My brother likes to take his meals with the indoor servants and field labourers. That's how he tries to show his equality with the people. Only, with all the equality, they are supposed to feel that he is first among equals.'

'If you don't mind, Elisabeth, let's pull the curtain while we are breakfasting. That will give us the illusion of being alone.'

'Now you'll believe me,' said Elisabeth as she slowly skimmed the cream from the milk and filled the cream jug, a beautiful piece of peasant handmade pottery like most of the utensils and furniture in the house, 'when I say that my brother is very loquacious. He is terribly upset. I'm worried about him.'

'Oh yes. He got in a few whacks the first evening.'

Elisabeth spread some bread with butter and honey for him.

'You mustn't hold it against him if he bores you. I was afraid from the first that would happen. He is a very decent person and unfortunately that is the very reason why he is boring you. I've given a lot of thought to the matter.'

Ernst Lieven laughed.

'That's a new habit of yours; giving a lot of thought to any matter. Have you come to any decision?'

'Yes, of course. Look here: I know now why decent people are generally boring. They have principles. And only the unexpected and the constantly changing can be entertaining. Principles never change.'

'The curtain does not prevent the peasant from hearing us. If you don't mind, let's speak Russian. *Sholschim udowolstuiem.*'

'I'm glad you are here; perhaps you can help him.'

'Unfortunately with Otto the question is whether to help him or to report him.'

Elisabeth looked up at him quickly. Her eyes wide she asked: 'What do you mean by that, Ernst?'

'I too sometimes mean what I say. I can't permit such opinions to pass unnoticed, particularly as he obviously intends to preach them (*an den mann zu bringen*).'

Elisabeth looked at her cousin with the same close attention her brother had shown the evening before. Then she nodded as if she had cleared up an important point. She poured out her coffee and opened an egg.

'This government is my government,' Ernst Lieven went on. 'I have given it my full trust. Whoever is against it, is my enemy too.'

Elisabeth put a spoonful of cream in her coffee. She had obviously made up her mind how to handle him.

'My darling Ernst, I don't believe that my brother, your cousin, will be able to do much here in Olmuetz against the government in which you have placed your trust. He is much more inclined to soliloquies than to making speeches at meetings. He is not made

for such stunts as the Black Front or things like that. He can't stand that sort of thing. Just let him alone. He will calm down. The next time he will probably bore you with some other theme. It was a real effort, pure spiritual torment for him to get rid of a number of old ideas of his a few years ago and to put new ones in their place. Then he took the new ideas just as seriously as he had the old. He takes everything damned seriously nowadays. And now you come along and ask him to forget a couple of ideas he has just accepted at the cost of much spiritual suffering!

'I did not know, Elisabeth, that you ever gave a thought to what was going on in the world. I'm surprised to see how clearly you suddenly see through things here in Olmuetz.'

Elisabeth leaned over the loaf of bread, and sliced it carefully, piece by piece.

'I never give a thought to world events, only to my darling brother. And here in Olmuetz I suddenly understand him.'

Now she looked as she had the first time in the railway train, her face almost distorted with cold and irony so that it was impossible to know whether she had said 'my darling brother' sarcastically or in all seriousness.

Two hours later Ernst Lieven was walking into the village when someone spoke to him from a garden. He could recognize nothing of the man who was practically invisible and inaudible save for his Nazi salute. Over his head the man wore a beekeeper's veil which completely covered his face and hands. As Lieven walked past again on his way home the man was waiting for him, this time wearing a frock-coat and tie. He introduced himself as the new village schoolmaster Mahnke. Ernst Lieven sat down beside him on the garden bench. Mahnke was proud that all the farmers as they passed could see their village schoolmaster in familiar conversation with an S.S. official.

He considered himself lucky to have made the long-desired acquaintance: his visitor was a person of importance. Herr Otto von Lieven was greatly upset over the latest developments. That was understandable. Who was not, after all? The Fuehrer had been betrayed by the man in whom he had placed the greatest confidence. Who would ever have thought that of Roehm, the leader of the S.A.?

'I'll make Siebert a solemn apology for my careless criticism,' thought Lieven. 'Our appeals were never superficial: and certainly not lacking in psychological insight. That was just a preconceived notion of mine. People can't believe enough ridiculous things. They

believed the story about the Immaculate Conception; they believed the one about Roehm's wild orgies. The Fuehrer was supposed to have caught him on June 30?"

'Let the chips fall where they will,' the new school-teacher declared firmly. 'The uncovering of shocking conditions did not leave our little circle untouched either. The business with my predecessor is sure to have been a great trial to Herr Otto.'

Lieven pricked up his ears.

'He never could quite trust the fellow: he had known him only casually from teachers' meetings. For a long time he excused him account of his youth and lack of experience. But the man's opinions often ventured in to dangerous fields.'

'I don't follow you,' said Lieven. 'Please tell me what this is all about.'

The schoolmaster explained that his predecessor had gone to a teachers' convention in Stettin. And there he had been fool enough to express before the assembly of teachers the same line of thought against which he had often been warned. The Party representative had sent in a report and the schoolmaster had been summoned straight from the conference to a hearing. Mahnke had been promptly ordered to move his wife and his three children into the schoolmaster's house, which had, for that matter, been far too large for a bachelor.'

'And your predecessor?'

Lieven had a mental picture of the lanky young man who had fallen in love with Elisabeth. He could see him sitting in Otto Lieven's living-room, his arms and legs wound round a chair.

He very much feared the man was in a concentration camp, the new schoolmaster said in the cautious voice in which one speaks of a ticklish matter. As Lieven got to his feet the schoolmaster remembered that he had not mentioned his favourite subject.

'The sunflowers are as big as babies' heads now,' he said. 'Do you know they are called in Greek: *Helianthos*. And what I deduce therefrom? The deep unity of the north Grecian culture.'

'Indeed,' said Lieven.

At suppertime Otto Lieven was much quieter, chatting easily, telling them the latest village gossip. Ernst Lieven asked casually about the former schoolmaster; the new fellow had told him a curious tale.

'Yes, that's right,' said Otto Lieven. 'I've really forgotten what it was. Concentration camp, wasn't it? And that's as good as being

dead? What else can one do with a man who tried to put a spoke in the march of progress?

Elisabeth looked up in surprise at her brother. She did not understand the allusion. Or the tone in which Ernst Lieven replied.

'What else? Let him kill himself.'

That evening Elisabeth went to her brother's room. He was sitting beside the lamp, but he had not turned it up.

'Is that you, Elisabeth?' he asked. 'Sit down, my dear. You don't disturb me. Even Ernst our cousin could walk in unannounced and it would not matter. I'm not studying any dangerous subject; or reading a foreign newspaper, nor have I any writing to conceal.' He propped his head on his hands. Between his elbows stood a framed photograph of Adolf Hitler. 'The wall where his picture was hanging is a little faded. I'm not going to hang it up again. Just take a good look at the man, Elisabeth. What do you think of him?'

Elisabeth stepped behind her brother. She looked over his shoulder at the picture as if she had not seen it hundreds of thousands of times in the last year.

'In Berlin,' she said, 'women kissed the tyres of his car when he drove out from the Kaiserhof. I hope I won't spoil the charming picture you have made of your little sister when I confess that I have very little liking for this demonstration of human passion.'

'For a long time,' said Otto Lieven, 'I thought that picture there was a symbol of Germany's future. What a strange thing a picture is. It brings out all that is most tangible in a person, all that is most difficult to falsify. You can twist things round with words and thoughts, but not with a face. Mouth and nose and ears cannot be falsified – one would think. And yet, this same photograph of a man is always the reflection of yourself. You see in it what you want to see. I wanted to see something in this picture and I said to myself: this face contains the deepest values – I am even moved by that lock of hair. I told myself: there is a strange childishness, something youthful about this man who is stronger than all of us. I looked at the eyes and I thought; the eyes of a fanatic, obsessed with a single great idea, staring straight at whatever is great. Now the face repels me. The eyes of a fanatic, yes. And fixed uncompromisingly on the only thing that seems great to him – power.'

'A couple of people gave that man his start, they say, hoping he would keep order in Germany. Because he was the only one who knew how, with their help, to keep the rich rich and the poor poor. He is the cleverest alchemist one can imagine. The king smiles and scoops in the false gold, perfectly well aware that it is false. His

alchemist is useful. Perhaps the man even thinks they are gold and in so far he is not a deceiver, but he deceives. Do you know the fairy-tale of the shadow?

'Come, try to sleep, Otto. You mustn't think so much at night.'

'One of Andersen's fairy-tales. The shadow serves his master until he himself becomes all powerful. The shadow gets to be bigger than his master's body. The alchemist, paid by the king, will become richer than the king.'

'Please don't talk about all this tomorrow. Specially not when Ernst is about. I think it would be better for you to take a few weeks off and go away: you are tired and ill.'

'On account of Ernst? Are you worried? Yes, perhaps he might be capable of reporting me.'

'You've said yourself, I give you good advice. Go away. I'll stay here at the house as long as you want. You can't trust Ernst. He always gets a kick out of doing the thing you don't expect.'

'Oh nonsense, Elisabeth. He certainly can't have anything against me. Now I'm going to bed. I'm tired. I'd like to get a good sleep tonight.'

Elisabeth looked at him in silence. Suddenly she burst out:

'You are the only thing I have in the world.'

'As a rule I can't stand the stuff,' said Lieven. 'But tonight I want to have a good sound sleep.'

He covered his hand so that his sister would not see how much of the sleeping powder he poured into his glass. To himself he thought: 'Too bad, little sister, I can't look after you any longer.'

He stretched out on his bed, moving over to the wall to let her sit down beside him. She tucked the covers in just as his mother used to do when he was a boy. Then he asked her to leave him alone: he hoped to fall asleep at once and to sleep soundly . . . for a long time.

IV

In his heart Wenzlow looked forward to seeing his Tante Amalie more than his wife Ilse. Old family ties, the joys and sorrows of youth, the subtle web of years bound him to the old lady who had cared for him even more unselfishly than a mother. He saw clearly, as he sat in the first-class compartment reserved for him, that a mother would never have been able to set aside maternal ambition in order to instil into him such an inflexible idea of family honour. When he closed his eyes he could see his aunt's long wrinkled neck

and the wart just above her chin; even the three hairs in the wart which had fascinated him so as a boy. He had only a fleeting memory of his wife, a mist of white and gold and pink fluff. Individual features, shy caresses, were lost in that pure and tender mist. A few more recent memories were neither so tender and pure, nor so misty. The parting from Manja, for instance – he had been obliged to forbid her to come to the station and she had understood perfectly. But the expression of grief on her lowered face hurt him even now. Over the last two years, there had been times when they had been almost happy together, though he doubted whether there were such a thing as happiness. Now she would have to find another friend for herself in the colony; another and still another, till she grew old on the weary round of her endless emigrations, wherever her gipsy wagon was stranded. He thought, smiling to himself, how Tante Amalie would have opened her eyes if he had brought Manja to Potsdam with him as a mistress. If the customs of the country had allowed him a concubine, she would have had to brew tea for Tante Amalie and for his parents-in-law and for Ilse.

The conductor came in to ask him courteously if he would permit a gentleman, who had been too late to reserve a seat, to sit in his compartment till the next station. The conductor was an elderly man; his manner was that of the type of subordinate Wenzlow had been accustomed to for the past three years. The behaviour of the porters had been very different from that of his coolies; when he had given his orders they had been short-tempered and rude. He was quite willing to share his compartment, he told the courteous conductor. Whereupon a small, bespectacled gentleman entered and introduced himself as an official from the North German Lloyd. The conductor could not make himself civil enough – he was full of apologies, bustling about, putting up their luggage and doing everything in his power to make them comfortable. The North German Lloyd traveller praised the man's assiduity and Wenzlow expressed his astonishment, because at first there was nothing else to talk about, except that, on the journey through the Soviet Union, the officials, though less capable had been better-tempered than these here at home.

'Because you were merely travelling through,' explained his companion. 'Here you are a superior; here you belong. The masses look on you as one of the people they are anxious to get rid of!'

A chill settled over the conversation. The little bespectacled gentleman was the first person in Germany to enlighten Wenzlow, after his long absence, on the state of affairs.

'Of course, all of us here at home thought at first; well, let's see what the man has in him. Meanwhile, Hitler has shown what he can do. In the first year he showed us that he could acquire power, in the second that he could hold it. Of course, in the summer there were a lot of people among us who feared that the general house-cleaning was going a little too far. A couple of uncomfortable pals at one fell swoop. Events have borne him out; he was right to do what he did. That is, not so much events as the complete lack of events. Nobody said a word and he got rid in one sweep of the whole bunch that were trying to talk him into all sorts of tricky experiments. I said to my friends, then and there; you'll see, I said, he'll keep control. For who was going to get worked up about Roehm and his crowd? There are still two sorts of people in Germany; those who are for Hitler and those who are against him. Those who are for him are naturally in full agreement. And those who are against him are fortunately by no means all for Roehm. I say, fortunately, because now our Reich is afloat again and has wind in its sails, a man can have confidence in it and can get on with his business.'

Wenzlow turned a deaf ear. He looked out at the dreary afternoon landscape in which the sightless eyes of lakes gleamed white. His heart, alienated by long absence, was overwhelmed by the deep solitude, broken here and there by a few lights. And in spite of the rolling of the train and the chatter of his companion he felt nothing but the silence that seemed to radiate from the brown woods and fields and lakes and penetrate his inmost being. On hotel beds and in rickshaws, in all his adventures of love and war, homecoming had always been connected with the feeling that, there at least, he would be at peace. Home had always been bound up with that idea of all-embracing peace. And nothing could have shaken that notion, not even the shots that had been fired at home since the war.

There were more and more lights along the road now; the rails ran together; the houses crowded closer; woods and fields gave way to the outskirts of the town. Wenzlow saw the interior of suburban houses. Suddenly he felt panic at the thought of meeting his family again.

Now they were at the Schlesischen Bahnhof and he was in the midst of an excited group of people. He recognized the faces of several of his former brother officers, as well as that of his father-in-law. He recognized his sister; it seemed strange that she should be there too. He had not thought of her for a long time. Her eyes

were shining now; almost dark blue. The little person with a silly round hat who held his hand so tightly was obviously his wife.

'Let's go straight home,' he said.

The only person he really longed to see, his Tante Amalie, had not come to welcome him.

'He wants to see his son at last,' cried Malzahn. Wenzlow had completely forgotten that he had a son.

Tante Amalie was standing on the enclosed balcony where she always stood and waited. Wenzlow was so excited that tears came to his eyes. Holding his aunt's two hands together in his, he kissed them. His aunt kissed him quickly on the top of his head; his stiff wiry hair smelt as familiar to her as the crown of the boy's head long ago. The memory made her heart ache. Her face had grown thinner and longer. Wenzlow looked at her with the satisfaction one feels in a good field that has a few more furrows.

Tante Amalie watched with compressed lips the meeting between father and children. Fritz Wenzlow concealed his anxiety; he kissed and caressed his bewildered children, two little girls wearing dresses embroidered in cross-stitch and the little boy, a tiny fellow in trousers and oppressively strange to him. In the Far East he had sometimes boasted proudly of his son; but the real tie was his two little girls, with their soft hair and their round bare arms. The eldest was his favourite; she had a square head and wicked eyes; she pulled away from his caresses, whereas the little one nestled trustingly against him. The eldest watched him from a safe distance, sullenly and distrustfully.

Tante Amalie had set the table in the living-room today. She had insisted that both families should be her guests, although the meal was almost more than she could manage. More than ever, at this family banquet, she felt that she was truly the head of the family. These were her descendants sitting around the table; Wenzlow just back from the Far East, her niece Lenore, the Malzahn family, the little girl who, as the eldest, was allowed to eat with them; even Helmut Klemm, usually a thorn in her side. In addition there were a couple of Wenzlow's friends: impudent Stachwitz, who had always been impudent Stachwitz, and even Justice Spranger, who called Wenzlow his boy and had driven out to Potsdam to welcome him.

Did they have rabbits in China too, asked the little daughter and was disappointed when her father said: 'Yes, tigers and rabbits.' He praised each separate dish. Tante Amalie had been saving the rabbit a long time; she had skinned it herself and stuffed it with

steamed cabbage. Wenzlow leapt to his feet; he drank Tante Amalie's health. Beaming with pride, the old lady clinked glasses all round the table. She stole a glance at Wenzlow to see how he liked the wine pudding. It melted in his mouth. He forgot all the sweet stuff that had ever been served in Asia and Europe and at tables in various casinos and consulates. And, once again, the only swastika at the family table was on young Klemm's sleeve.

His handsome boyish face turned as naturally towards Wenzlow's as a leaf towards the sun. The look of self-consciousness and superiority that often made it appear harsh and unkind was replaced by an expression of unbounded devotion. Often, during family quarrels or controversial questions at school and in the Hitler Youth Group or over lessons which seemed to him insoluble, he had comforted himself with the thought: 'I'll ask Uncle Wenzlow when he comes back.' Wenzlow himself had not the slightest notion of the place he held in this boy's heart. He did not dream what a wealth of hatred and hope the conversations that preceded his arrival had stirred up between this boy and his aunt. The old lady had sneeringly asked the boy whether he intended to wear that silly uniform even at his uncle's homecoming.

Uncle Fritz had immediately put his arm familiarly around him. He had said to all those standing near: 'Whenever I saw pictures in magazines abroad of the way our German youths now look, I would unconsciously look for this boy's face among them.'

At that Helmut flung his aunt a triumphant glance and the old lady's lips drew into a thin, angry line. No matter how far away the picture of the Fuehrer might seem to be, the firm clear picture of this uncle was a bit nearer to himself. As dessert, Tante Amalie herself carried in the *Baumkuchen* which the Malzahns had presented; she had done without servants even today, preferring to spend the money on the punch. She was secretly afraid that, tall and beautiful as it was, it might put her sweet in the shade. She listened jealously to the delighted outcries. She had stuck a black, white and red flag on top of the cake. Helmut flung his aunt another look when his uncle said:

'Now the boy will have to storm the *Baumkuchen* so that we can plant a new Reichs flag on it.'

Spranger said to Malzahn: 'Our boy amuses me. He has learned out there in the East to think twice about casual remarks.'

When all the glasses were empty, when the *Baumkuchen* had also been polished off and the little black, white and red flag lay neglected on the crumpled tablecloth among the remains of the

dinner, the guests began to take their leave. Ilse Wenzlow went into the next house to put her sleepy daughter to bed. Fritz Wenzlow followed his Tante Amalie into the garden.

'Many, many thanks, dear Tante,' he said, 'for the wonderful dinner to welcome me home.' Though his heart was full of tenderness he could not think of anything better to say.

'I am very glad you are home again,' she said. 'I am worried. You have no idea how these Nazis, I prefer to call them the newly rich, strut about among us nowadays. First, when Hindenburg received this man, when he appeared frequently in his company, I hoped that this fellow they now call their leader had turned over a new leaf. I hoped that he realized at least to whom he is indebted. But I'm afraid he does not. At least not those men who came up with him do not. It's a fine bunch of thugs that runs around in uniforms nowadays. Our youth is poisoned. Take the boy in our house, Lenore's son, little Klemm. You can't imagine what airs he gives himself in the Hitler Youth. He has no respect left for us, and when he comes back from his holiday with his guardian he is worse than ever. You must give him a piece of your mind; fortunately he is still as devoted to you as ever and looks up to you the way a fifteen-year-old boy does to a relative he respects.'

'Look here, Tante Amalie,' said Wenzlow, 'you must try and see things as they are. Perhaps that may be hard for you in this new age. Of course, there are many of the new leaders who do not hold our old concepts of honour; but you must admit our country has taken a tremendous upward turn. You can't imagine how respectfully people speak of Germany even in the Far East. The very people you object to have taught our neglected, starving people discipline and moderation. As a result we officers of the old Army find it easier to make decent soldiers out of them.'

'Yes, if you get your hands on them.'

'The Hitler Youth and all the S.A. and the S.S. nonsense is only the prologue because we don't want to blurt out the news right away.'

'Ah! Not the star performance itself, I hope! How much good it does me to talk things over with you! You know I am not much of a one to talk in a crowd.'

'And just look, Tante Amalie, at Old Fritz when he was still a boy! All the quarrels he had with his father. The old soldier-king wouldn't hear of anything but his soldiers. He broke his son's flute over his head. But later, when Frederick the Great was king, he himself laid the flute away in the back of his bureau drawer. He

realized that his father had been right; he had realized what one needs to lead the nation to great things.'

His aunt said: 'Oh, Frederick the Great is like the Bible: an example for all things. I must have time to think over what you have just said. It is not easy for me, an old woman. You must go to your Ilse now, my boy. You mustn't spend your first night at home with your old aunt.'

Wenzlow felt a little depressed as he crossed the garden and entered the house next door. While all the others slept Tante Amalie began to clear the big guest table. She put the long tablecloth to soak in a basin, intending to wash it out early in the morning.

Thirteen

I

SINCE HER HUSBAND'S transfer to Cassel, Ilse Wenzlow was no longer called the Little Malzahn. There was no one in the garrison who knew her from the old days; even Stachwitz was stationed elsewhere. They had all been tossed about hither and thither by the new enlistments, promotions and transferences connected with the inauguration of universal military service. If at first Wenzlow had looked upon his journey home merely as a leave of absence, he was glad for many reasons that his plans had worked out in such a way that he could drop his foreign commitments without difficulty. The China command, which had seemed to him an opening in the wall, in the solid, inescapable wall of life, had lost its attraction for him since his life in his own country had become less restricted. Everything that had occurred in China after his departure – the long march by means of which the Red Army had avoided attack, crossing the Yangtse almost under the enemy's eyes – he accepted as natural events in a part of the world he had once happened to know. He was not one of those people who cling to foreign countries and feel strange in the narrow circle of their own home. At home too there were plenty of unforeseen possibilities, most of all in the future, possibilities that no longer automati-

cally led from one promotion to another to end in a pension and the grave. He slept soundly now, no longer waking in the night to worry uselessly. One would have thought him rejuvenated if the search for unusual and difficult goals had been a characteristic of his youth instead of worry about everyday life with its commonplace yet insidious dangers.

Ilse Wenzlow received and entertained guests without the oral or written advice of her mother or Tante Amalie. At home her two little girls and her son had seemed like younger sisters and a younger brother. Now in the evening Wenzlow discussed the matter of the children's education with her, and this gave her a sense of maturity and conscientiousness, so she herself soon became conscientious and mature. The eldest daughter, Anneliese, was one of those girls of whom families say: 'She ought to have been a boy!' It was as if Nature herself at the last moment had, while not granting their hopes for their first-born, at least given them a thought. She was heavy-boned with a somewhat sullen face; she was defiant and tough and clever at all sorts of physical tasks. She went out with the Youth Group more than her parents liked. She liked their prescribed organization better than the desirable invitations to the houses of the officers' daughters which her parents urged her to accept. Instead of making friends with these girls she made the strangest friendships, in the Hitler Youth Movement, with daughters of artisans and labourers. Her childish and unflagging eagerness to know the people from whom she sprang brought her not only into Youth meetings, but also into a part of the town her mother never saw.

'That is just what the Fuehrer has in mind,' Wenzlow said, smiling at his discouraged wife, one evening in the living-room, while the children slept. 'The whole nation must become unified above and beyond all class distinction.'

'What I don't understand,' said Ilse Wenzlow, 'is that this child, our daughter, does not keep within bounds of her own accord. All one has to do is to suggest something to her and she rebels against it.'

'You must understand,' said Wenzlow, 'that our child is fulfilling a sort of mission when she does that. Just because she is our daughter, those very families with whom she now sometimes comes in contact feel that the barriers that once separated the classes have disappeared. This is one way of preparing the ground for training the masses. They gain confidence though no order is executed, either in war or in peace.'

The second daughter never gave occasion for such conversations. Visitors said of her when she was still in her cradle, 'A little woman.' In one afternoon Marianne would often be more tenderly caressed by parents, teachers, and passers-by than her sister Anneliese in her whole life. It was hard to say whether her mother dressed her in pretty clothes and her father took her on his knee because she was always laughing, always ready to help, or whether her laughter and her willingness to help were the reward for the caresses which people gladly proffered her merry round little face.

The boy, the youngest of the three children, was still too small to do much but fulfil by his mere presence the Wenzlow's twice-disappointed longing for a son. He looked the epitome of this fulfilment. He laughed and played exactly as expected. Wenzlow's comrades all agreed that Wenzlow adored his only son above everything else. Only when she was alone with their wives did Frau von Wenzlow admit that the second daughter was her husband's favourite.

But the holy of holies – which no one, not even Wenzlow himself, knew – was reserved for the eldest daughter, harsh, rough, unfriendly Anneliese. When he came home from official duty in the evening he was disappointed if the girl had stayed with her group. He loved the child most tenderly in the moments when his wife thought she was most annoying to him. Once he called the girl into his study to give her a scolding. She stood there in front of his desk, indifferent, absentmindedly plaiting her short pigtails, in her creased white blouse with the swastika on the sleeve. Suddenly that swastika caught his eye, like a threat and a warning. She listened passively to his sharp reproaches about the complaints of her teacher and her mother, about visits she had forgotten to pay and regiment celebrations she had missed, about the way she ran around God knows where and came home late. And, with all these reproaches, he felt that he was not even scratching the surface, to say nothing of reaching her heart. At the most she vouchsafed a dry retort.

'What you call running around was a very important Party job', or: 'What you call negligence is wholly unimportant to us Hitler Youth.'

He banged the table with his fist and shouted at her. The more useless his reproaches the more violent they became. The more violent the reproaches the more tender was his heart. And the more coldly and indifferently the child opposed him, this man who was considered just but harsh in his official duties, the more deeply

impressed he was. He felt secretly that no child in the country could stand up so imperturbably to a father like himself. At the little girl's age, and even now, when he was older, he would have been unable to answer back so boldly.

He knew in his heart that this was no ill-bred girl answering an angry father, but one part of his conscience answering the other part. He loudly approved the opinions of his brother officers that one must close an eye to this and that measure of the N.S.D.A.P. because, after all, even if one did not agree with the Party in everything, it had made Germany great again. No matter how trifling, how disgusting, certain of those measures might be, great things had come out of them: the re-annexation of the Saar, universal military service, re-installation of the officer class. One must merely watch out that they didn't go too far.

To the little girl the Party meant something else. To her it was the highest, the only thing. She called her father's objections prejudices. He himself longed just once not to have to be on guard, to forget to weigh the pros and cons.

The first hour in which Wenzlow had seen life whole, since his return to Germany, was when he rode at the head of his artillery regiment over the Rhine bridge. At last, he thought he understood perfectly what was meant when he said – his people. One single heartbeat, in rhythm with the march over the bridge. From this side of the bridgehead he could already hear the jubilation on the other bank. The shouting re-echoed back from the Rhine, out of the bluish-grey water in which the reflection of the city trembled. The swastika that had angered him so often on his little daughter's sleeve waved a thousand-fold from every pinnacle and gate and from their shimmering reflections in the water. He rode past the place where his former brother-in-law, Helmut von Klemm, had plunged into the Rhine with his car and his chauffeur. But he was not aware of it nor would he have given it a thought had he known it. His thoughts dwelt much on his little daughter; mentally he craved her pardon. The child had been right to give herself to the Fuehrer, heart and soul, unquestioningly. The man who, despite envy and slander, had dared after so many years to occupy the Rhineland deserved to be called Fuehrer.

He saw now only the straight road from Versailles to the present, from shame to rebirth. The wild huzzas of the people, crowding round the soldiers with flags and flowers, drowned the thin little inner voice that had sometimes tried to make itself heard. It drowned even the last half-uttered thoughts, surmises and doubts,

and those strange secret orders, in case of armed opposition, to retreat. In the face of all that rejoicing he scoffed at those comrades who had called the entrance into the Ruhr foolhardy. The move had been successful; no foreign power had interfered; therefore, in retrospect, it seemed impossible to think it might have failed. The warnings Hitler had received from many sides now appeared to Wenzlow, since those fears had proved groundless, petty, timid, almost traitorous. Those foreign nations that had permitted the occupation to take place without interference he considered contemptible and weak.

However, he was to meet with disappointment from an unexpected quarter. He returned to Cassel firmly determined never to scold his little daughter again. He even explained to his wife why the little girl, with a sure instinct, had understood the new age better than her parents.

His wife welcomed him home, half distractedly, half angrily – Anneliese had had an accident. In one of their contests she had tried to plant a little flag on a pole, had fallen and bruised a couple of ribs and broken one.

The little girl still lay in bed. She did not listen to her father's account with shining eyes as he had expected, but in silence and to all appearances apathetically.

At first Wenzlow did not notice how quiet she had become. He thought her silence and inactivity were merely the result of her accident. Nor was he surprised to see her reading books in bed to while away boring hours. Certainly no one could say anything against the books her old schoolteacher lent her. It was most praiseworthy of Fräulein Lehnert to visit her pupil frequently. The school chaplain came too – visiting the sick was part of his job. To be sure, the Bible he left behind on the night-table seemed rather out of place. One could not find fault with the chaplain, because he had no idea what sort of thoughts filled a little girl's head.

The narrow confines of the little girl's life were as inexorable as those her father had recently destroyed. They were just as rigidly regulated by the society into which she had been born; but they too had several openings, entrances and exits. It was possible to escape them. Once outside, one could also, like a prisoner accustomed to his jail, return to it again. Also, with vision that has become adjusted to a narrow space, one could see only those things one had been used to seeing. Of the people living outside these confines, now and then someone or other slipped in by accident or entered on a pass the guards had given him. The old schoolteacher

* had just such a pass, permitting her to creep through the barriers to her pupil's sick-bed. Even the school chaplain had one. They brought presents and books, thoughts and words with them on this visit to the prison. The school chaplain did not come with empty hands; he brought a number of thoughts that remained with the child, disturbing and worrying her. She wondered about an expression he had used and which struck her as strange, even unheard of: 'In God's sight all men are equal.' When you pursued that thought the consequences were so great that one dared question no further.

The Malzahn grandparents in Potsdam invited their granddaughter to convalesce in their house and the invitation was willingly accepted. Wenzlow was a little amused but pleasantly surprised when his Tante Amalie wrote:

'Your eldest daughter, Anneliese, gives me great pleasure. She is a real ray of sunshine to me in all the trouble little Klemm always gives me. We were disappointed at the time of her birth because she was not the son we had all hoped for. But it is evident now dear Fritz, that she is your eldest child. I prophesy that this child will be true to the principles of our family her whole life long.'

Ilse von Wenzlow laughed; the girl was obviously behaving herself in her great-aunt's drawing-room.

Slowly, little by little, Anneliese began to feel like an individual, a separate identity in the world. And because she had just become aware of herself as an individual, she was more strongly conscious of it than grown-ups who have lost the memory of that discovery. She was also more sharply aware than grown-ups of the value of that self, a revelation that comes but once and is limitless in its possibilities. That self she could surrender whole-heartedly only to the Hitler Youth Movement who accepted it as unreservedly as she offered it. She had been repelled by the fault-finding grown-ups who seemed to her selfish and insincere. Her first doubts came to her through books and their talk about those books. Her father's and mother's pride in the aristocracy was ridiculous. Perhaps pride of race was ridiculous too. What if Pastor Schroeder were right? What if it were true that in the eyes of God who, as Anneliese believed, had created everything, all men and women were equal?

To be sure Tante Amalie was as proud as Anneliese's father. But when you were helping her in the kitchen, you could talk to her about many things you couldn't mention out loud at home. When you told her that Pastor Schroeder had said 'In God's sight all men are equal', Tante Amalie would say: 'Yes, in God's sight. But here

on earth, God has established an earthly order; we must abide by it. In the next world he is the only one to decide. Not Hitler, only God.'

That raised many other questions. Truths one had believed unassailable were doubted, things one could not explain were said to be true. The girl could not make up her mind quickly enough about this world and the next. But she always liked to be with the old lady who sided half with her father and half with Pastor Schroeder. Anneliese enjoyed those talks and so did Tante Amalie: this little girl was the only one who had the time or the inclination to inquire into her thoughts.

Cousin Klemm, young Helmut's guardian, bore a certain family resemblance to the latter's dead father. His features, however, were coarser—his bulbous nose, as well as his mouth, his eyes and his intelligence. He had none of that love of irony, that decisive manner, that had made Klemm, in his lifetime, the centre of every gathering, military or social. Cousin Klemm now sat stern and erect facing the S.S. official who had summoned him to a conference of double importance for him. His ward's future depended upon the outcome of this meeting, but this was not the real cause of Klemm's agitation. If, however, the Nazis refused to take Helmut, if his nephew were not admitted to the Fuehrer's school where the Party trained the young S.S. candidates, then the boy would indeed be most disturbingly in the way of his plans for the future. In that case, he would be unable to prevent young Helmut from rightfully demanding a leading position in the firm, and his own sons (whom he had destined for this less brilliant but certainly safer future) would be on his hands. He was, therefore, determined to fight more ruthlessly than usual any objections this S.S. officer, who had summoned him to clear up the family relationship, might offer.

'I should like to ask a few questions, Herr Klemm, before I forward my recommendation to the proper places. I must tell you at once that I myself am in favour of your plans. But I cannot be too careful when it is a question of recommending a boy to the highest educational institute in the land. If I have correctly understood this questionnaire which you have filled out most carefully, you became Helmut von Klemm's guardian on the death of your cousin?'

'Yes, that is correct.'

'You were appointed guardian because a divorce had preceded the accidental death?'

'Yes — that is also correct.'

'The guilty party was Frau Lenore von Klemm?'

'That is correct - yes.'

'Exactly. Now we must go into this point a little more thoroughly. The question must be clarified where pupils of a privileged school are concerned.'

'It was clearly established before the courts, through testimony of witnesses, that the lover in question was a Herr von Lieven, at the time serving in the Freikorps. At the same time, it was indisputably proven that Helmut was conceived in lawful matrimony by his legal father, my cousin. The lover, Herr von Lieven, first came to the Rhineland after the Kapp *putsch* when his brigade was engaged in the Ruhr rebellion. That fact was proved in my own hearing before the court.'

'Good, good. But you can prove that Frau von Klemm's life before this love affair was immaculate? While this woman's family is otherwise above reproach, her conduct in this Lieven affair would force one to the conclusion that she was not too strict about faithfulness in her marriage. And that is just the point. It is our business to see that no drop of inferior blood creeps in among the pupils chosen to attend the Fuehrer's training school.'

Klemm realized that exaggerations, isolated facts that could not be checked were wholly out of place here.

'During my cousin's absence,' he said. 'I lived in his house - I had been wounded in 1916 and was unfit for service. At the time I ran both his business and family affairs. Lenore von Klemm, as a trained nurse, took care of her father-in-law, my uncle, till the latter's death. And during that time she was never, one might say, out of my sight. I can, therefore, stand guarantee that the lady in question indulged in no relations before the visit of said Lieven. Because I know that my ward is the oldest male heir of our family, I am particularly anxious for the child to be trained for the state along the line of his particular talents.'

Helmut waited feverishly for the final news, whether, where and when he was to report. He was on the best of terms with the leader of his Youth group. He knew that he would have the highest recommendations from all sides. He also knew that the slight delay had some connection with his mother's previous life.

His father's photograph now stood on the table by his bed. When he was alone, he liked to look at the strong, smiling face with the short blond moustache. He tried to read from the laughing merry eyes what his uncle had often told him of his father: that he was one of the men who had paved the way for Hitler. That father had been

one of the few men who had realized the importance of the Fuehrer at a time when he was still being ridiculed and misunderstood. That father had risked his life in war for four long years: he had won the Iron Cross first class; he had been seriously wounded three times. Helmut even knew the story of Becker, the orderly who had later become chauffeur and who had been killed with his father. In the legend that grew up around his dead father, Becker, loyal to his master even unto death, played a brave role. Helmut also knew little post-war legends about Becker's devoted services when his father had kept on fighting for Germany's honour in spite of the Versailles Treaty. He had learned from Stimpert his Youth leader all about his uncle's guardianship and about his parents' divorce shortly before the motor accident. The boy's indifference turned to aversion when Stimpert dropped a hint that his mother was the cause of the recent queries. He had often complained angrily to Stimpert at having to spend his whole youth with two old women. His great-aunt, Tante Amalie, had never counted; now his mother, too, had ceased to matter. If there could have been as much doubt about a child's maternal as about his paternal parent, then Helmut would have thought of himself as a changeling.

One morning on the way to school he was summoned to Stimpert. He could see from Stimpert's cheery face that the news was good. Klemm was to enter the training school on January the first. The Youth leader had just received word.

That his great-aunt and his mother should oppose this step was no more than a ridiculous and unimportant nuisance to Helmut. He did not even listen politely when they gave him their opinion emphatically and in detail. They talked till late in the night explaining that today a young German boy at last had the opportunity to follow his grandfather's and his great-grandfather's footsteps and devote himself to an officer's career in a free Fatherland. Hauptmann von Wenzlow, his uncle, would soon be sending his only son into the proper corps. And his own father would also have been an active officer if the Versailles Treaty had not ruined everything.

'Why do you hold up my father as an example, Mother?' cried Helmut. 'He wasn't so very important to you otherwise.'

Lenore stared at the boy. She turned pale and lowered her eyes. She did not see but she heard the slap Tante Amalie gave the boy straight in the face. The aunt's pale blue eyes were cold and angry:

'How dare you, you stupid boy?'

At that, Helmut leapt to his feet and rushed out of the room,

banging two doors behind him. That night he slept on Stimpert's sofa: he refused to live any longer under the same roof as Tante Amalie.

The next day Stimpert called on the two women. As the boy's mother, there was nothing to prevent Frau von Klemm from entering a protest against her son's schooling. But apart from the annoyance which such a protest would mean for the boy's future life, it might have most unfortunate results for the two ladies if Stimpert were to divulge the real facts. Take, for instance, the Lenkert family. As so-called Bible scholars they were forbidden the right to bring up their three children; an incident the little town had discussed all summer. The Lenkert parents had even, Stimpert believed, been sent to the camp at Oranienburg.

Lenore did not speak.

'We are not Bible scholars here,' Tante Amalie said gruffly.

She motioned to Lenore to keep silent: she preferred to handle the conversation herself.

'You must appreciate our feelings, Herr Stimpert,' she said in a somewhat milder tone: 'You look to me like a more sensitive man than many. We come from one of the old families who made Prussia great.' She looked askance at Stimpert's hairy bare legs. He certainly could not claim the same distinction for his own family. 'That is why we asked the boy whether he was determined to give up an officer's career. The Fuehrer has, of course, made Prussia great again and is again offering officers' sons a future . . .'

When Stimpert had gone away satisfied she said to her niece: 'That's the way you have to talk to that sort of person. I could see from the expression on your face that, if you so much as opened your mouth, you would have landed us both in a concentration camp.'

Her niece did not stir.

'Besides, the boy has already become estranged from us.'

Lenore started to speak, then thought better of it. She felt completely helpless, empty and hollow, chained hand and foot. She felt as if she were in the clutch of a power that had suddenly swept away her life. She had no means of fighting it, neither pleas nor prayers, neither love nor despair – nothing that the force of that power would not sweep away like dried leaves before a storm. Her grey eyes had turned almost black when Stimpert began to speak. The old lady had lived with Lenore long enough now to recognize the sudden change of colour in those eyes and to know its meaning. Now, alienated by her aunt's last remark, Lenore's eyes flashed as if lit by a dazzling light within.

'You ought to have behaved more sensibly in your marriage that time,' the old lady added angrily. 'But don't worry about that now. Your boy has slipped through your fingers. Let him go!'

II

Christian Nadler was much surprised one day to receive a visit from the innkeeper's son. The latter was not one of Christian's customers, but had remained loyal to the crabbed old village cobbler. Christian was not prepared for visitors: his only intercourse with men had been for so long in soling and mending their shoes. As the innkeeper's son did not state the object of his visit, Christian wondered what on earth the fellow could want of him.

The visitor began by extravagantly praising Christian's workshop. When he then went on to stress the loneliness of the spot and to shake his head in disapproval, Christian looked up in surprise.

'It's all a matter of taste,' he said. 'One can't quarrel about that.' He was a little annoyed because he could not make out as quickly as usual what the man was aiming at.

'I know what I'd do in a lonely place like this,' the visitor went on, 'especially if it was as hard for me to get about as it is for you.'

Christian was all attention.

'Well, and what would you do?'

'Why, I'd get myself a radio. Then I could sit here on my three-legged stool, and I'd be as much in touch with the world as if I had two good legs.'

Christian gave him a sidelong glance. 'This man,' he thought, 'must be an agent for a radio company . . . probably gets a commission on the number of sets he sells.' And he listened, chuckling to himself, at the enthusiastic praise of the radio into which the innkeeper's son now launched. First he praised the invention in general, then the cheap instruments they had been putting out for some time so that every man could afford to have one.

'Most inventions,' said the visitor, 'benefit the rich only. But the radio is different: it's as good as a gift and that's the way it should be, for why should a few rich men control the air waves? As a fellow countryman it's yours practically free of charge, whether you can run around on your two legs or are obliged to squat here all day long.'

'Of course,' said Christian. 'When the moon rises at night I always think at least that moon is rising for all of us: it's the people's

moon. And then when the stars come out I think, now here come the people's stars.'

The innkeeper's son gave Christian a worried look. When he saw that the serious expression on Christian's face did not change, the man went on eagerly.

'You don't like to go about any more than you have to. You don't like to go to the big meetings. It's not even easy with your lame leg for you to go to my father's when all the people in the village go there to hear important speeches. But you wouldn't have to go to the inn, because the speeches would come to you over the wireless.'

'And all the speeches in the whole world,' said Christian. 'That's really tempting.'

'Well, after all, we don't understand anything but German, so we don't need all the speeches in the world,' said the innkeeper's son. 'You couldn't understand them anyway. You wouldn't go about the whole world even if you had two good legs like me.'

'You're right,' said Christian. 'When you have to sit still you always think people get more use of their sound legs than they do.' To himself he thought: 'I'd better agree with everything he says or he'll keep on coming here to the shack and bothering me every whipstitch.'

Of late, affairs in the Nadler household had improved, though not on account of lucrative deals or because harvests had been better or conditions had improved. Wilhelm Nadler was still dependent upon his same meagre sources of income which were never enough to cover his debts. Nor had he learned anything from experience: he had none of that strange peasant strength that helps men sometimes out of the worst difficulties. He had always been a soldier to the marrow of his bones, never a farmer. Like an old warhorse champing at the bit at the sound of the drums, Wilhelm was ready at the first call to hang his sickle on a tree.

Meantime, his sons had grown up. The eldest boy was careful and hardworking. Though he had joined the Hitler Youth Movement he took it all more as an interruption and an annoyance than as a change or relief from hard work. The second boy, nicknamed Egghead, was more inclined to shirk, but the family kept a close watch on him. That was Wilhelm Nadler's speciality: keeping after the others. They had to make good what he could not manage to do by himself.

He now had three strange boys as farm helpers. They slept in

the hay at night. True, they had to work like dogs for a mere pittance on the Nadler farm; but they preferred to be sent there rather than into the farm-service camps. Like Nadler's sons, they too belonged to the Hitler Youth. Their fathers were S.A. men: they had no foolish misgivings about the state of the world. Early in the morning, when the swastika was raised on the village square, they stood stiffly at attention with the rest of the boys from the farm service who were quartered in the village. And when they came back from the lectures they were obliged to attend regularly they proudly repeated to Liese, her daughter and the little children what they had learned about government, about race and propagation and about the world which had come to such a pass as the result of its own ineptitude. They all liked Liese with her merry laughter and her big breasts bursting out her blue cotton dress. And they were particularly pleased because at the bottom of his heart Nadler was not really a farmer. They liked the sharp commands with which he spiced their work in the fields as if they were not farmhands, but soldiers: they liked the stories of the World War and of his service in which he told them in the evenings about Freikorps. It made the work all the more fun when at times he drilled them vigorously, at others praised them just as vigorously.

That was why they had helped the boys detailed to Nadler to make a large piece of moorland arable. And when Wilhelm Nadler directed the work, he was like a captain in the field with his joking and shouting and cursing. Once cleared, the ground was as good as a gift. Not only did Nadler profit by it, but the boys also worked much harder under his shouted commands than they had before in the labour camp. There they had only been a crowd: here they were individuals, useful boys, goaded and harassed, it is true, but nevertheless boys in the man's eyes.

When they staggered, exhausted, into the kitchen, there was good, thick potato soup steaming on the table. Liese's reddish-gold mop of hair shone like a flame. Liese was gayer than ever before. She felt that she and Wilhelm were a fine couple. To be sure, she did not care anything about him; her blood turned against him as people were now saying one's blood ought to turn against an inferior, poorer race. Liese did not exactly know what they meant by that. In other respects, however, Wilhelm had been right: they really were over the worst; the farm was now all of a piece again. The hours alone with her husband Wilhelm were quickly over; the rest of the day passed quite pleasantly. She was a farmer's wife, held in esteem by all the village and by the farm-service boys, as well as by

her husband's S.A. comrades who sometimes came to him for advice.

It had taken a good deal of money to clear the moor and afterwards to plant. The money they borrowed was hardly cheap, the interest was on the high side because enemies of the government were always secretly spying round. However, when a man had a good reputation he could always get something, in case of need, by pulling strings. When the ploughed moor still did not bring in any return and the harvest failed to cover the taxes and interest and repairs, Wilhelm Nadler began to look round again for someone to stop the leak in his affairs. Christian, he knew, was no longer to be counted on. He had suddenly announced that he had not a penny to spare.

At this moment, Wilhelm Nadler longed more than ever to put his affairs in order. Ever since he had developed the moor and added it to his holding, an idea had also developed in his mind which had its root in the new regulations concerning a farmer's family estate. It was true that Nadler's property did not quite come under the legally prescribed measure; the family did not live entirely off the land nor was it really free from debts and taxes. But Wilhelm had enjoyed such a good reputation for so long that the people in the government farm bureau would be sure to close an eye. A fellow could always manage to get through if he was clever enough. There was still a piece of land missing – for instance the strip his father had once made over to Christian at a time when the inheritance was still foolishly divided among all the sons. If the matter were ever to come up, there would be no proof of an adequate payment to Christian. However, Christian was no obstacle: Christian was easy to handle.

But when Nadler applied for the loan, to his amazement he was promptly turned down. The government had recently instructed its employees to go easy with new loans, at least till all cases had been carefully examined. They were, therefore, obliged to take exception to things they formerly overlooked. Wilhelm Nadler had a number of unsecured notes against his name; moreover, his younger brother would not consent to relinquish his share. It transpired that the note had been turned over somewhere, somehow to a name Wilhelm Nadler had never heard before. Levi, to whom he had once owed money, had disappeared long ago. Wilhelm Nadler had thought that, when he paid Levi, his debt was cancelled. He was now told this was not so. The note had not vanished into a Jewish concentration camp. It had passed into other hands even during the Jew's lifetime.

The whole village looked on in excitement when one morning Wilhelm tramped across the fields to Christian's. Christian sat on his three-legged stool looking out over the lake. The moment he saw his brother's face he knew what had brought him here. He went on quietly mending.

'No one is going to drive you out of your shack here,' said his brother. 'It doesn't matter to you whom the police come after. But you're much too weak to work as hard as we do. I've helped you get the shack in order. The first thing for you to do is to give up your claims.'

'Wouldn't think of it,' said Christian.

Wilhelm glared at his younger brother.

Christian went on working. He heard the threat out, then he said:

'What are you getting so excited about? I know people who'd give their eyes to bring their fields under the family estate ruling. They don't want their younger children to lose their inheritance. Not on your life. They don't want the eldest to get everything. They aren't owners of entailed estates, they say. They want to leave their land as they want and to whom they want.'

'Then they don't understand that, if they do, the estate will be even more split up,' said Wilhelm. 'They'd rather have their children a lot of poor devils, instead of one prosperous son who can help his brothers. Besides - I wanted to ask you something. Did you ever hear of a Herr Strohmeier?'

'Not that I know of.'

'The swindler says I owe him money. Do you remember Levi?'

'Of course,' said Christian. 'He used to come sniffing around here quite a lot. I filled him up with cash and also your IOU's.'

'Then I do owe you the money after all?'

Christian said in a low tone: 'Depends how you look at it. That's all over long ago; the note has probably passed into other hands. Who knows, perhaps Strohmeier's. Maybe he has the right now to demand of you what I had to in the past.'

From the end of their fields the farmers watched curiously the outcome of the conversation between the two brothers. There was plenty to see. Wilhelm stood straddle-legged, his arms raised as if he were about to beat his brother. But, still keeping his back to him, Christian went on calmly stitching. He heard Wilhelm's heavy breathing.

'Did anyone ever hear the like of that from one brother to another! You're a regular Jew!'

He stamped his foot so furiously that Christian turned around. Wilhelm's face was purple with rage.

'You damned swine! And here you live alone on your three-legged stool, pay no attention to anyone, haven't any family, nothing.'

'That depends,' said Christian slowly.

Though Wilhelm had never really understood Christian, he now realized vaguely that his brother was remembering some old family tales and that he was not in the least pleased that the eldest son should inherit the whole estate. That heavy breathing, deep down in Wilhelm's chest, burst out in a groan:

'What do you mean by that, you filthy rat? What does that mean – *that depends?*'

'Well, just look at all the boots – they're like children to me.'

Then at last Wilhelm turned on him:

'You crooked, wretched skinflint! Shooting's too good for you. I'd like to wring your neck!'

Christian shook his head gently as if with this slight movement he were shaking off Wilhelm, strong and furious as he was. He said even more softly:

'Understand this, Wilhelm. The notes have been out of my hands for some time. Strohmeier, or whatever the fellow's name is, is the one who has them.'

However, Christian secretly made up his mind to get himself a good dog, just in case. It was better not to be without any protection.

That evening Wilhelm told Liese the whole story. He drank and he cursed. Of late Liese had enjoyed hearing about her husband's plans for the future. To build up the farm again and keep it together had always been her dream even when Wilhelm had paid far too little attention to such things.

'So you can see, Liese, what a stinker he is. I always suspected the dirty beast of being a scoundrel. Now he wants to cheat our eldest boy out of the best.'

He called the second boy who was playing in the kitchen to him:

'Get out, kid,' and gave him a kick. Liese had listened to everything, at first agreeing briefly, angrily, then thoughtfully. At last she listened in silence. All of a sudden her dislike for her husband swept over her in full force. She locked him out of her bedroom. She watched him mistrustfully.

She did not dare to run over to Christian any more. From the

field she saw that now he always had a lean supple wolfhound lying on the bridge beside his three-legged stool.

III

Thanks to Schimmel's excellent recommendation, Lieven often recalled with amusement how anxiously he had hoped that Heims, the banker, would find a place for him in his bank. It had been a miserable position, but better even so than the electric-display company. Old Heims was a stiffbacked little old man with a moustache brushed up so high that the ends almost touched his eye-glasses. Lieven had been obliged to keep his connection with the Nazis a strict secret. Heims was patriotic, but rabid against the Nazis. His eye-glasses almost hopped off his nose, so wide did he open his eyes when Lieven suddenly appeared in his office one day wearing the black S.S. uniform. His first thought was whether Lieven held a grudge against him. As this did not seem to be the case, he began to think it might be a fortunate thing to have had an S.S. official as an employee prior to Hitler's rise to power. He found numerous opportunities to let Lieven understand that he, Heims, had long ago guessed what he was up to. Such behaviour amused Lieven highly. He went up quickly in the ranks of the employees. His chief, Heims, also moved up at a surprising rate; he landed on various financial advisory committees, on boards of directors and delegations. Because of his knowledge of languages, Lieven was placed in the department of Russian affairs. He was considered, both among his bank colleagues as well as among his Party friends, an adept at getting on with the Bolsheviks.

Soon people formed the habit of saying: 'We'd better send for old Heims. He'll bring Lieven, his righthand man, with him.' Lieven would translate aloud in a low voice questions and answers of the parties concerned, propositions and figures that slipped across the barriers between the two groups like ghosts to lead their lives in the countries beyond the two ends of the table. As he translated, Lieven omitted those matters not bearing directly on the subject at hand.

'From your name,' said one of the Russians to him once, 'you must be a Balt.'

'I grew up in Petersburg and went to school there,' Lieven added:

'We two are representatives of two very young countries.'

'Your boss, Herr Heims,' said the Russian slowly, 'apparently does not think much of that youth. I mean, he has grown very grey

since I saw him the first time here in Berlin in the 'twenties. That was on the occasion of one of our first business conferences. At that time we were really beginners. Your Heims was old even then. He has outlived all spans of life.'

It was rumoured in Lieven's department that he would be sent to Riga to close the deal. His superiors in the Party were extremely pleased. He was given missions to the consul and the Party posts for Germans living abroad. On his last evening Siebert invited him to dinner. He had long since married the governess with whom in the old days he had been living in Lankwitz. They had three little children now! Lieven had always avoided private visits because the family bored him; their food as much as their offspring and their conversation, a duet of mutual agreement between husband and wife. The Sieberts agreed on all questions from bringing up children to the anti-Comintern pact, from the Abyssinian war to raw food. There had always been a great deal of uncooked food in this house so prettily and attractively served that Lieven, who had privately decided to have a late supper, refused the dishes. He would hate to spoil those beautiful flower-beds.

Tonight he was even more bored than usual. He showed no alertness until Siebert asked him about his family estate beyond Riga.

'That's been in the hands of that monstrous Lett state for a long time now. At the time my cousin bought a farm for a ridiculous sum which he borrowed from a couple of relatives.'

'Your cousin,' said Siebert a shade too casually, 'committed suicide. Why did he do it?'

'I am against suicide,' said Frau Siebert, 'but certainly not for the same reasons as the Church. I am against suicide, not because a man ought to wait till God takes his life, but because he must do everything with his life that the Fuehrer plans.'

'That's my opinion, too,' said Siebert. 'The Fuehrer cannot spare anyone who can help him. And as my wife has said: to refuse to live is the same as refusing to help the Fuehrer. What was the matter with your cousin anyway?'

'Oh,' said Lieven, 'an unfortunate love affair. His nerves had gone to pieces ever since that time he was seriously wounded in the fighting around the Baltic.'

'I'll admit to you now that I seriously feared your cousin might have had something to do with June 30th.' Siebert added smiling: 'At first I even noticed in you – how shall I say? – a certain inclination not to take things with the proper earnestness.'

'I hope,' said Lieven dryly, 'you have convinced yourself now that I take things with the proper earnestness.'

'If I hadn't I wouldn't have said what I did. We have to give our children time to grow up too. We ourselves are not much older; we have all of us been reborn within the last four years.'

'That is a thought I often have,' said his wife. 'Our children are just as old and just as young as the Third Reich.'

Lieven stood the farewell visit more easily because he drove straight to the Tempelhofer Field that same night. He spent the time before his departure in the waiting room at the airfield.

It was the first time he had flown. But because he hated to appear before his fellow travellers as if he were a novice, he behaved as if he were an old hand at air travel. The man beside him, a director of the I.G. Farben, was on the first lap of a journey to Asia with a brief halt in Riga. They became acquainted in air pockets and in the clouds, and they cemented the acquaintance-ship while looking out of the cabin window at the earth which seemed so small and easily traversed. The director did business with the present manager of a Klemm company in Amoenburg as he had formerly done business with the cousin.

'You remember Klemm, Lieven, the one who came to grief on the Rhine Bridge in a motor accident!' Yes, Lieven had also known this Klemm, during the war and the revolts in Berlin and the days of the Ruhr battles. All this helped to pass the time. 'My God,' thought Lieven, 'I even had an affair with his wife once.' Herr von Klemm, he agreed, had been an extremely attractive, extremely enterprising man.

'The cousin has, of course, none of the wit and the spirit of enterprise of his predecessor,' said the I.G. Farben director. 'All he needed was to follow in his footsteps. Before his death von Klemm had already gone over to Hitler. I remember how he always kept harping on the fact that we all underestimated the man.'

They were approaching the end of their journey. Lieven recognized Duena Island where one crossed the river. He pointed out to his fellow passenger the probable place where his cousin was wounded. The English had poured a lot of money into the land at the time, to drive out the Bolsheviks on the left and the German Freikorps on the right. The little Republican country down there, green and watered, studded with church towers, was now a sort of no-man's-land between the German and the Russian borders. They agreed that the Duena must soon be connected with the Dnieper, to make a water route direct from the Baltic to the Black

Sea. They landed, each man pleased with the travelling acquaintance he had made.

Lieven was met by the Consul's car. His arrival had been heralded both by the Heim Company and by the Party. The consular clerk asked at breakfast whether he had owned land here.

'Not I, but my cousin.'

'We like to welcome relatives of the old families who used to own land here.'

The clerk proved to be well informed.

'Your cousin is dead. In normal times you would have taken over the ownership.'

Lieven had never thought of this possibility. It would have been unsuitable either to dream about it or to wish for it. He asked his companion to take a walk with him beyond the city and he entertained him with the same stories with which, in the forenoon, he had shortened the flight for his fellow passenger. But now his memories were more tangible.

The main building of the old Lieven estate was in the hands of a local family. The properties were let or divided; even separate portions of the estate like the fishery, the dairy farm and the smithy. Most of the buildings had been rebuilt or torn down. The present owner, a merchant, had, however, left the main building untouched, perhaps because he liked the doorway and the columns. Lieven remembered these columns, in the style of Czar Alexander, as taller and brighter in a still and softer evening light. Here was where he used to get out of the carriage that always brought him, on his holidays, from the station in Riga. The coachman was always the first link with the family. His young aunt usually stood on the steps to receive him. He would kiss her hand, embarrassed; and she would take his head between her hands and kiss him firmly. From her hair came a wonderful perfume. In those days he used to look forward to that perfume even when he was still in the train; he would wonder whether he dared embrace his aunt. In the end he always ended by kissing her hand. Elisabeth had inherited her slightly mocking, slightly sad smile; her charm and her proud carriage.

His companion suggested, laughingly, that they should venture to call on the owner. But, once inside the house, Lieven's memory failed him. There were only a few traces of the former magnificence; a staircase, a fireplace, a couple of windows. Even the stairs were more a memory than the actual stairs themselves. The place was cluttered with old rubbish of which the new owner was exces-

sively proud. Obviously he had money and lived here only in the summer. He listened to Lieven's apologies, at first annoyed and then without expression; Lieven explained that he had longed from childhood to see once again the place where he had spent the happiest hours of his life. The owner was courteous enough to offer him tea. He was a big-boned, heavy-set man; he had opened the top button over his huge expanse of stomach. He showed the guests the inner garden where he raised vegetables and chickens. Though his face was almost expressionless his manner clearly said: 'Perhaps, as you say, you spent your happiest hours here; but you see, we can get along very well without you.' Lieven looked at his companion and smiled when the owner spoke roughly to the maid who served tea; an elderly, morose peasant girl who jumped at his command. And the undertone of the command said: 'You see, you don't need to tell us how to deal with these people. We can give orders very well on our own.'

Lieven wondered whether Elisabeth would find here what she sought. A couple of columns, yes; a flight of stairs, yes. But every thing else had gone up in smoke.

IV

Hans took off his shoes and tiptoed in his stocking feet to his parents' bed. Marie's long plait showed plainly against the covers. He gave it a gentle tug. She motioned to him not to wake Geschke and, slipping quietly out of bed, ran barefoot into the kitchen.

'You must hide this package,' he said. 'Somewhere where no one will find it.'

She tried to read his face. His belt-buckle shone. Then the light in the bar went out. The ray of light then ran straight across the street into their flat slid back as if someone were hauling in a rope. One could hear men shouting to each other on their way home from the bar. Marie said: 'I don't want something to happen to you as it did to Heiner.'

Three years had passed since the death of Helene's husband, Heiner, and neither of the two families who lived at opposite ends of the city had been informed of the cause. The baby girl Helene had been nursing at the time of her husband's tragic homecoming had been going to kindergarten now for some time. By his mysterious death the dead man had kept the Gestapo away from his own home, as well as from the home of Groh, who lived with his mother, the cashier in the suburb Britz. The doctor had been

unable to save Heiner – all he could do had been to make out a false death certificate. But the more persistently they maintained silence the heavier lay the shadow of that death night over all concerned. Helene went back to work as usual. After that brief period of happiness her heavy face again looked as ugly and sullen as in her childhood when the street urchins used to torment her. Thanks to his mother's incredible economy, little Groh was now learning a trade. Little Berger had been forced into compulsory labour. Hans was going to a trade school. At first Marie had been relieved that the boy was alone and his companions scattered. The machinist was proud of his apprentice and Hans was proud of his skill. He was constantly winning prizes in the professional contests that were being held to spur on the men. He should have quietly shared the new wisdom which most people calmly accepted: that from birth he belonged to an exceptional race, in a country respected and feared, where a good workman was quickly singled out from among the less skilful apprentices and promoted. But once again he evidently had some connection that was involving him in danger. As if to herself, Marie murmured:

'I did not bring you into the world for that.'

'Well, for what, then?'

She looked at him in surprise. Dark as it was in the kitchen, she knew his face so well that she imagined she could see it now, even to the lights round the pupils.

'Certainly not for the Gestapo to beat you,' she murmured.

'For the army then, I suppose? So that I can learn how to kill others?'

'Not that either,' she said. 'I always felt it was for something special.'

'Well, you were right there. I am something special too. There's no one at our place who dares to do what I do. Perhaps there wouldn't be half as much spirit and go if I weren't there. I never give up.'

He stretched out in bed quite pleased with himself. Tomorrow was time enough to be excited. First he would snatch a few hours' quiet sleep. Franz was now with the army; so Hans had the bed to himself. As he was dozing off he heard his mother opening the sideboard. That was probably where she hid things.

Marie sat down on the floor; she raised one of the boards. The space beneath would just hold the thin little package. She ran her hand round inside. Geschke's gun still lay wrapped in a couple of rags in its old place. It had luckily escaped the search for weapons

next door; also the money lure of the old days when soldiers were urged to turn in their guns and receive cash for them. Geschke's household had never been under suspicion, not even under Hitler. Geschke himself had long been considered a shy, sullen fellow who did not quite understand the new age, but was certainly not dangerous. 'I'd like to know,' thought Marie, 'whether he himself ever remembers the hiding-place.'

She forgot the fear that had gripped her when the boy made his request. Suddenly the thought she had had twelve years ago, when Hans had been brought home bruised and bleeding, came to her mind. Full of confidence, she thought: 'Nothing can happen to him: he is safe.' She lay down beside Geschke, who now slept soundly ever since he had had his old job back.

The next day when Hans went out and called back to her 'Don't wait up for me, I'll be late', Marie thrust away the presentiment of misfortune as if, by so doing, she were thrusting away the misfortune itself. Helene had come to see them: she was sitting at the kitchen table. Geschke was playing with his granddaughter. As Hans went out, he looked up and scowled.

'You can't hold him back, Father,' said Helene. 'He is obliged to go to the Hitler Youth. You can't run your head against the wall. These times will pass too.'

'Perhaps,' replied Geschke, 'but how and when? When I'm dead and gone. In my work a lot of people are as happy as monkeys on a chain dancing for sugar. Nothing ever ends of itself.'

Helene exchanged glances with her mother. It struck her that her mother knew what was going on. Perhaps they could also tell her father the truth. But tired, hopeless and depressed as he was, would he be able to stand secrets of that sort? He had grown old; his hair had turned grey. She saw how heavy her mother's heart was although she laughed as she poured the coffee. Hans had never told his sister what his mother knew. That made it easier for them both to keep up a pretence of being happy before Geschke who knew no more than Helene's child.

This time Hans came home again. He pulled a paper, folded in tiny pieces, out of his shoe and smoothed it out on the window sill. 'Mother, you should at least see what you hid.'

On the way home the thought had suddenly occurred to him: he and possibly the whole family might be arrested and she would never know what she had hidden.

'This is the picture of Europe. This is a bird; he has two wings

and a heavy tail; he always looks down at the ground. The tail is Germany in the centre, that's the swastika, and one of these two wings it is trying to lift, is Russia, and the other is Spain, because they are fighting for freedom there. I drew that. I thought it all out myself. I like it.'

Marie liked it, too, though she could not quite understand what it all meant. 'Yes, if you could always be here and explain everything.' Though she was always on the lookout, expecting to come upon some sign of her son, as if a leaflet like this, a poster or a dot of red ink were the mark of her boy, she did not see that mark often enough. There was the red flag suddenly waving from a factory tower at a dizzy height; someone said, half laughing, half angrily, that the ladder had been smeared with soap to prevent them from hauling the flag down quickly. There was a leaflet Tante Emilie once found in her letter-box that had a lot to say about France and the struggle of the French working man and something called the People's Front, which was the exact opposite of Hitler's People's Union. Once the hammer and sickle was smeared with chalk on a department store window. When she saw these things, Marie always thought 'this was his own idea, he planned this.' When Hans, obsessed by his belief, told her that his old friends were just as crazy as he, that they too were now about to pull off the same bold feats, Marie thought: 'But my boy was the only one who could do something like that.'

In the days that followed she was surprised to see him often sitting quietly at home. She cast stolen glances at the back of his round head; it suddenly seemed to her that the boy's anxiety stood out in every bristly hair. He depressed her. She felt as if, once again, she were alone with her boy among strangers who did not share her grief. Her head was too weary from petty cares and insignificant joys to have any room for memories. Not till now, when the boy's grief leapt out at her like a fiery spark, did she understand that the past had not lost its power just because she had ceased to think of it. On the contrary, it was so much a part of her that there was no need for her to think of it. Undigested and abstract matters require much and frequent thought. But whatever has become a part of one's being no longer needs to be recalled. What could be troubling Hans? Not fear. Save for moments of panic which seized him now and then like intermittent fever, he had conquered the generic fears which eat their way into life: fear of the police; fear of prison, fear of being beaten, fear of death.

What else could it be? Not love. He was not seriously interested

in any girl yet – Marie had discovered that. Now and then there had been a girl, blonde or brown, with straight or curly hair. His love affairs had flared up and died down like fitful lights. Why, all of a sudden, did he sit so long in her kitchen? Instead of helping her, his unusual presence at home depressed her.

‘Why don’t you go to see Groh?’ She had often been jealous of Frau Groh, the boy’s mother, of whom Hans seemed to think more than he did of her. The Groh woman understood things Marie had never heard of. Hans often went to Britz to ask her advice. Now he said shortly: ‘They’ve gone away.’ But she saw from his face that she had hit on the thing that was troubling him. He added drily: ‘To Leipzig, to their relatives.’

‘For long?’

He answered shortly: ‘For ever.’

Suddenly he got up. ‘I’m going to Helene to find out whether there they’ve heard from Oskar.’

But he did not ride to the last station. He got out three stations before. From force of habit he walked past the house where Martin, to whom he had been so devoted as a boy, had lived. And, as usual, he looked up at the window that had been Martin’s. The window was as blank as ever, the house as grey. How often in the past four or five years had Hans stood there, in despair. The tradespeople had all told him, smiling: ‘We ourselves don’t know where he is now.’ And how many, many times had Hans run after some man in the centre of Berlin, someone short, with a head shaped like a nine-pin. Perhaps he had looked for a vestige of his friend in every face and in all the friendships offered him. He thought: ‘That’s the way I was and that’s the way I am. I get fond of someone and he goes away and I am alone and the world seems to be smaller.’

Instead of going straight to Helene’s, he turned into a side street and walked past the bar where Martin used to stop now and then for a drink. On the street there were three tables behind the boxes with their ivy covered lattice-work. Formerly the dusty boxes, dappled with sunlight, had seemed to him like a garden and every word his friend spoke had quenched his thirst like nothing else in the world. The man stuck his thumbs in his trouser’s pockets and Martin had always put both thumbs in his own. He glanced at the man’s face. Martin had been fairly short for a grown person. Hans had been obliged to look up at him: now he looked down on him. Time had somewhat marred the familiar features. The head, shaped like a ninepin, was still the same; the merry, impudent expression in the narrow eyes and a something you could not put your finger

on, but which was characteristic of the whole man, something always different and yet always the same.

Hans said: 'Martin.'

The man gave no sign, but went on his way as if he had not heard. Hans might have thought he had made a mistake. It is true that before he became friends with Martin, the boy had not even been conscious of his thirst. He thought: 'That was when it began with me. Since that I have had no peace.' The dusty, ivy-covered lattice work still stood there along the street. Hans was now so tall that he could see over the top. At one of the tables sat a man who looked as Martin might have looked. Not exactly, if you peered closely at him; but there was a resemblance. He was short, and his head was shaped like a ninepin.

The boy stepped back as the man got from his table. Hans went up to him: he had himself under control. He was determined, at his age, not to let himself in for a second disappointment. As he walked past Hans, the stranger glanced back and Hans realized that the man had seen him. Suddenly it occurred to him that Martin could hardly have recognized him. The swastika on his sleeve would have put him off! And in the years between he, Hans, had grown tall. Martin had stayed short; grown-ups do not grow any more. He slipped into a doorway behind Martin's back. He jumped on the bus Martin had boarded at the station before. Hans stayed on the platform so that Martin would not see him at once. As he was getting off the bus, Martin came face to face with Hans. He stopped short. Hans could read that face better than any other in the world—he had always been better at faces than at words. Now he realized what the man was thinking: 'Is this boy following me? Why has he crossed my path a second time?' With a few quick steps, Hans overtook him and caught him by the sleeve. Martin stood still. He looked at the young boy. His eyes narrowed.

'Martin!' cried Hans.

'You've made a mistake,' said the man. Instinctively he reached into his pocket for his papers.

'Now you are making a mistake,' said Hans. 'No one would reach so fast for his papers just because a Hitler Youth spoke to him. Don't you recognize me?'

The man looked at him sharply. He thought: 'Why, this must be the boy, Hans. He has recognized me. I can't do anything about it. If I pretend not to recognize him, he'll stick to my heels.'

Hans thought: 'How did I happen to recognize him at once? He has changed. He had a little moustache before—and a scar. He is

quite changed. Close to, he does not look like himself at all any more.'

'Well, well, Hans,' exclaimed Martin, 'you've shot up like a weed. You and I have both changed in these five years, inside and out.'

Hans thought, 'Now he's probably going to tell me that everybody has changed in these last years. But he, Martin, has not changed. For men like Martin do not change. I loved something about him, loved it madly, and that something certainly does not change. I loved him because I felt, even when I was still a foolish little boy, that there is something in him that never changes. It is in him now too. Only he does not trust me.' Aloud he said:

'Dear Martin, let's go into the café. Let's celebrate our meeting.'

Martin thought: 'Of course, it's best to go with him. I'll tell him I am travelling for some business concern: I must keep cool.'

He ordered coffee and nut-cakes. When Hans smiled at the nut-cake Martin felt a pain in his heart: 'I loved this Hans; Gerlach used to tease me you might think he was your son,' he'd say. 'I drummed into him everything I knew. I thought he was my responsibility, that he must be made proof against bribery and lies and fear his whole life long. And now see what is left of my responsibility; the swastika on his sleeve and his pleasure over the nut-cake.' Aloud he said: 'You are big and strong now. They do a lot for you boys in the Hitler Youth.'

Hans thought: 'What's he trying to give me? Why doesn't he trust me?' He said bitterly:

'You don't believe that yourself. They do a lot for us boys so we'll be good and strong for the war.'

Martin thought: 'I mustn't let him catch me. They're sure to be trained to talk that way. I mustn't persuade myself that he is talking honestly with me just because I want him to.' He said:

'I can't imagine that there are still people who tell you such tales.'

'There are still people,' Hans said, 'who won't let themselves be soft-soaped. You can see now in Spain how they're practising for a war. Do you think we don't know anything here? Why are you pretending with me?'

Martin thought: 'Perhaps I am under suspicion wherever I go. Now he's beginning to talk about Spain.' Aloud he said:

'That's what the Bolsheviks say. They think Spain is the tinder-box that will set off all Europe.'

Hans thought sadly: 'He doesn't trust me, he doesn't trust me.'

'I've been so homesick for you,' he said. 'I would have given my life to see you again. Now it's no use. We have to part again. You haven't changed, I know that. I can't give you any references. I

can't say: Ask this man, ask that man. You don't trust me and there is nothing I can do to make you trust me.'

Martin thought: 'Above all, I don't trust myself. I don't trust my own strength, which I once placed in the boy, to be strong enough to hold now.'

The swastika on the boy's arm was one trade mark more in the dense throng that filled the café and every street. Martin grabbed him quickly by the arm.

'Wait,' he said. 'Sit down again. Tell me some more. What have you been doing all this time? What has happened to our old friends?'

Hans sat down again. He was trying to find a way to pour out his heart, the only treasure he possessed, unspoiled, indestructible. He said hesitatingly:

'Your landlady's husband has been dead a long time. You probably know that yourself. Your landlady exchanged flats with a sister; she isn't a bad woman. She knows my sister.'

'But what happened to the two nephews?' Martin asked. 'Are they in the Hitler Youth? The big fellow in the S.A.?''

'The younger one is doing compulsory labour service now: the oldest was my brother-in-law. He married my sister Helene. You once told me about a thread that ran straight through the street from one end to the other; at first it is only a thread and it can tear, it can also, you told me that time, be a warp-thread in a web. I haven't forgotten anything you told me.'

'Maybe he is loyal,' thought Martin. 'Perhaps I'm misjudging him. If so, then nothing is lost yet. I would know then that the thoughts I once planted in his head have stuck there. I would know then that in this one instance I was the stronger!' Aloud he said:

'Is your brother-in-law in the army now?'

Hans shook his head. He looked at him sternly.

'He is dead,' he said. 'We were distributing leaflets. They shot at him. We managed to get him home. He died in secret to keep suspicion from falling on anyone.'

Martin thought: 'It takes strength to mistrust a person. And it takes strength to trust.'

Hans went on: 'I have told you all that because I trust you. But you, you wouldn't dare. You don't dare trust me even now. Perhaps a little more than before, but not nearly enough.'

Martin thought: 'I mustn't do it. So far he hasn't often been disappointed; so far no one has cheated him.'

More people came to their table. They felt now completely alone, now as close as if they were one.

Hans said: 'I'd like to go up to your room just once. All these years I've longed to do that. That was the place where I first learned all the things that have influenced my life.'

'You will learn many more things that will influence your life.'

Hans shook his head. 'You can't tell. I might die quite young. My sister's husband died young.'

Fourteen

I

THEY WERE SITTING alone in the kitchen. Marie said:

'Listen, Geschke . . .'

He looked up quickly. From her tone he knew that she had something important to say.

'I mean, he is old enough now; I mean, we must finally tell him that you . . .' she fumbled for a phrase and did not find one . . . 'that you are not his real father.' The phrase, once spoken, displeased her. She herself did not know why.

Geschke looked wide-eyed at her. He took a ball of wool from the table and began twisting it between his fingers.

'You shouldn't do that, Marie,' he said.

'Why not? We have to tell him sometime. A child has to know who his father is.'

'You don't know that yourself, exactly,' Geschke said. 'Even you can't tell him much. You haven't learned anything new in these seventeen years. He is just as dead now as he was then.' Marie bent her head over her sewing. Geschke was right about that: he was as dead as he had been that time long ago. Nothing had been added to her memory and nothing taken away. He looked just exactly as he had looked when he came to her little room. In memory she could hear the quick steps coming upstairs – just like that. And at the thought her heart grew light with joy – just like that. She said:

'I mean if he has to go into land service now. He'll be leaving home for the first time. That's always a big step. I mean, it's better, then, to get everything straightened out beforehand.'

Geschke burst out violently: 'No, don't tell him. You promised me not to tell. Keep your promise. I don't want you to tell him.'

'But why not? He is old enough. I can't bear to keep anything important a secret.'

'No, don't tell him. Haven't I always been as good to him as a father?'

'He will be all the fonder of you. He is old enough.'

'Marie, we had the child together; you were always good to my children and I was always good to ours. You know I don't feel Franz is really my son. You know yourself how he is. I've always hated the Nazis: I hate them and I always shall hate them. They've given me a job and even better pay and I hate them. Now they've offered me holidays with pay and a trip to Thuringen if I want it, and I can't stand them, I hate them.'

She thought: 'Why does he tell me all this now? What has that to do with Hans?'

'Hans and Franz don't seem like brothers,' Geschke went on, 'with Hans you can sometimes talk things over. He is much more my son. I don't want to lose this boy too, all of a sudden.'

'All right,' Marie said. 'If you absolutely don't want me to tell him, then I won't.'

'I'd have probably done something against the Nazis long ago if it hadn't been for you two. I'd have told them the truth – you smear butter on our bread, I'd have said, to fill us up and make us contented. You give us peas and bacon, so our mouths won't drool when we see you eating roast goose, to keep us from growling, to keep us from complaining, so that we won't strike. Many a time I'd have liked to say that.'

Marie thought: 'Why does he tell me all this now?'

'I'd have told them that long ago,' Geschke went on, 'but I didn't, because I didn't want to bring trouble on you. The boy is just starting out in life. I don't want to ruin my family. For my own life it doesn't matter. I don't care a snap about it.'

Marie thought: 'These thoughts have never occurred to Hans. He does not feel that he wants to spare me. Does he love me the less for that? Do I love him the less?'

'If we so much as peep, he cracks down on us. And on all the countries round us, just the way he does with us. That's why he is so devilish strong.' He went on bitterly: 'If you tell our Hans the truth now, then you're taking him away from me – the only thing that's really mine. And I won't have it, do you understand?'

Marie said softly: 'Yes.'

They sat silently facing each other a little while longer. Then, oppressed by the silence, Marie began to speak of the first thing that came into her head.

'Frau Triebel told me she has seen her husband for ten minutes. He is still in the concentration camp. That long, expensive journey for ten minutes!'

Geschke said darkly: 'So, Triebel is still alive, is he?' He went over and sat down in front of the window. In his mind's eye he saw Triebel crossing the misty street; he saw him fumbling with impatient, furious hands. He saw him pull down the corners of his mouth sarcastically; he saw his impudent, alert eyes. He saw him in the trenches; in the bar; at the coffee stand; in the icy street at the time of the last troop movement in the winter of '32. He heard the violent words Triebel shouted out to him. But not the meaning of those words; now he heard only their sound. He heard the door bang the time they had finally quarrelled.

'When I get my next dole money,' he said: 'I'll slip a little money under Triebel's door. She needn't know where it comes from.'

Marie went on sewing and thinking: 'I shall not tell Hans because I've promised Geschke not to now. But one thing I'll certainly tell him, about Geschke putting the money under Triebel's door. The boy will be pleased at that. Perhaps it is more important for him to know that than who his real father was.'

When Martin saw Hans come into a cinema or a café, each felt, with sudden gladness: 'He is still alive and we are together again.'

Martin had long ceased to distrust Hans. He knew now that each time he met the boy a rush of youth filled his own tormented disillusioned life. When Hans talked to him he forgot the years between them as one forgets the date when he planted a tree that has grown tall and filled out with branches. The years between them had melted away as if those last years had been measured by a gauge different from any time had ever known. For some those years seemed to race by; for others to pause and stand still.

To the boy, their brief encounter was as precious as ever. During the week he thought up all the troublesome questions he wanted to discuss in detail with his older friend. So sure was Hans that he would always get the right answer that the older man forgot his weariness in his effort not to disappoint him. This was easier for Martin when he sat by himself, intelligible and lucid, for then he could ask himself: 'Is that an answer with which he can be satisfied?'

To be sure, Hans still had a few friends with whom he could discuss most matters freely. Most, but not all. Only with Martin could he talk about anything and everything. On a number of important points concerning their life in common he could, for instance, go to a friend like the old Berger. He saw a living proof that a man does not have to lose his freedom if he will only stand fast. Berger was still in his old job; he was clever at dropping a few words here and there and sowing mistrust and doubt in his gang. 'Good thing we let Hitler have four years' time,' he would say; and someone would remark in surprise: 'Why, are they already up?' Or: 'A fellow can hardly remember the time he was worrying because his son couldn't find work anywhere.' Then his colleagues asked him: 'By the way, where is your Oskar now? Isn't he coming back to our department?' To which Berger replied, in delight: 'Not yet, not yet. He is doing his compulsory labour service now, and when he is through with that he has two years in the army. But he'll still be young enough then for us to teach him something.' Whereupon his neighbour would say: 'Hope so,' or just raise his eyebrows.

Hans went to Berger for advice about the contents of the leaflets and about their secret printing and careful distribution. The man was so completely immersed in this sort of work that of necessity he was obliged to push aside everything not connected with it. He could not tolerate hesitations and doubts that would have robbed him of his sleep.

Nor did he spare his son Oskar, though he had lost the eldest. Heiner, at an early age. Oskar was utterly loyal and courageous. Hans was ashamed whenever he went away from him unsatisfied and empty. For Oskar was a boy who said 'yes' loudly and decidedly when he was asked to risk his life that all men might some day lead a better life. Hans did not even dare to ask himself what that better life was. To Oskar the better life meant: no land work, no compulsory labour and no army, so that he could learn a trade, as quickly and thoroughly as possible, and marry the girl he wanted, and eat and drink and earn better wages. As the finest of fine futures he could not imagine anything better than the fulfilment of innumerable big and little wishes, so far unrealized. He was too lazy and dull to dream about a merely imaginary world. He had only wishes and no dreams. He could not understand why Hans spent his spare time working over a strange drawing of an engine. He could not understand why Hans was suddenly disillusioned with this or that girl. There were quite a lot of things Hans would have been embarrassed to discuss with him.

With Martin, however, and only with him, could he talk of everything. He never had to be ashamed before him. With everyone else, Hans could discuss separate parts of life. With Martin there was nothing he need leave out; no adventure, no disappointment, no doubt, no sentiment. For, no matter how tenuous that sentiment, Martin was always ready to listen to it. He did not consider it unimportant or insignificant as contrasted with nobler feelings. He was more apt to discover a thread connecting that modest, little sentiment with the source – perhaps it was an ordinary love affair or some music played on an automatic piano . . . as if life were so short and so precious that one must live even its most infinitesimal part to the full.

Since Hans had become self-conscious and had sensed his own individual ego, he had realized that life in general was menaced and sooner or later might come to an end. Life as he had known it had always been in danger. The people crossing the streets, boys learning their trade in the locksmith's shop, all the men and women laughing around them in the café – they felt no such haste, such eagerness. They even fooled themselves at times into believing that it was going on for ever because it was not always and not visibly in danger. Ever since the night they had brought Heiner home wounded it had been clear to Hans that something could intervene suddenly and that one must be prepared for it.

But one could often forget that for long periods, though the warning sometimes hit one as sharply as a blow. Once again Hans sat with Martin behind the same ivy-covered lattice work at the same café. The thin, broken ray of sunlight flung a shadowy pattern of leaves on their table. Hans thought it was like a garden he had known in childhood. The hedges were just as high; they shut off one just as completely from the street. Martin listened attentively to his story: the end of the apprenticeship, the examination he had passed with good marks – he had thought out in detail the right and the wrong answers to the questions the Nazi representatives asked candidates. The right ones he kept to himself, the wrong ones he told other people. He had been warned by the failure of a little apprentice. Though he knew his subject thoroughly the boy had failed to pass the examination the year before. The Nazis had asked him:

'What comes after the Third Reich?'

'The fourth Reich,' replied the apprentice quickly without stopping to think. Whereupon he was demoted and classified as a day labourer. Made wise by this experience, Hans said in answer to the same question:

'Nothing can come afterwards; that is the end of the history of man.'

They had a good laugh at that, till Hans told Martin that he had been requisitioned for compulsory farm labour.

'Then you won't see me here when you get back,' Martin said.

Hans felt the same sharp pang he had known that time so long ago at the station when he realized that his big friend was leaving him alone in the city. He sensed in advance the hopeless emptiness of the city. He would come back from farm service: perhaps he would even find a few older friends – the Bergers, father and son, his mother, his sister Helene. But the one who counted most would be missing. The streets would stretch out before him, mile after mile, endlessly; the tall houses would shut him in; broken bits of sunlight would fall through the vine-covered railing on his table; but his loneliness would be tremendous, almost unbearable.

Martin said: 'Maybe you could go away with me.'

Hans looked up in surprise.

'You are old enough now,' Martin said. And he went on to explain in brief, hasty words, as if by brevity and a matter-of-fact tone he could separate events from emotions. From every country in the world volunteers were striding across frontiers to reach the people's army now fighting in Spain. From strange parts of the earth they came, from islands in distant seas, from inaccessible mountain-tops; they came in ships or on foot after long marches.

Hans thought it over: to go away – that was the invitation for which as a child he had waited in vain. And now, a half-grown boy, he longed fiercely for nothing so much as to fight openly, not at night in city streets, now pasting up placards, now giving his teacher cheeky answers at examinations, but to fight furiously, gun in hand, face to face with the enemy. Today as on that day long ago he would have liked to go away without stopping to think twice. But he did think twice and he hesitated. He shook his head:

'I can't.'

'Why not? Why can't you, of all people? We need every man we can get there too. Hitler is sending Franco officers and aeroplanes. There you would be doing something really useful with your life.'

'If I stay here I'll be of use, too. Our friends have told me: we need you. They said: you, especially. I must not go. I believe it is my duty to stay here now.'

He was looking ahead in his thoughts. And Martin looked at that same point – as if they had both discovered the same little point of

life in a wilderness and knew that either way it could be of use. Hans was the first to turn from that little point and look at Martin:

'I feel as if everything held me here.' He made a slight motion with his hand. Even if one looked through one of the squares in the vine-covered lattice, there was nothing to see but the dreary street filled with an afternoon crowd.

Martin did not refer to the matter again, but the boy sat brooding over the problem as if the older man were still trying to persuade him. And every time he came up with the same decision:

'No, Martin, I have to stay.'

That evening, as he entered the kitchen, his mother turned and looked at him as if she were glad he had come back alive. Suddenly Hans saw her clearly, as if she had turned and looked at him for the first time. And for the first time he noticed that her hair, at the roots above her forehead, gleamed like gold. All the way home his mind had been obsessed by the one thought: now comes that disgusting land service and then, when I finally come home, Martin will not be here and there will be nothing but emptiness. Now, he thought: after all, my mother will still be here. And he thought, too, that she would still be there even if someday something should happen to him. Just as one knows that the sun is always there even if you yourself are taken away. Suddenly he was sorry that now, after he had finished his apprenticeship, he could not take a salaried job at once. It would still be some time before he could earn money to buy her something very lovely, something no one had ever bought her before . . . a new blouse of some kind of silk, perhaps, or maybe a taffeta apron, the kind women did not wear in the house. True, he would get a paid job after the land service was finished. But after that came the army.

'Your father took some money from his compensation pay and shoved it secretly under Triebel's door,' Marie told him. Hans nodded. That evening he said very casually to Geschke:

'Triebel is still in a concentration camp. It's a wonder he's still alive. A wonder, too, he hasn't cracked up yet. What do you say to that?'

'What can I say?' Geschke replied: 'I'm sorry for him.'

'When you see a man behave like that, you have to say: "Hats off to him."'

They formed the habit of referring to various subjects around the kitchen table without going into details, as two actors give each other cues on the stage. Geschke promptly took his cue:

'Of course! Hats off to him! I say so too; I respect him too. Only

that doesn't mean I like him any the better on that account. A person can be decent and yet be in the wrong.'

'He never had much use for the Nazis. You can at least say he was always consistent.'

'No, he hadn't much use for the Nazis,' said Geschke. 'But I'd probably have the same sort of fight with him this minute if he came straight out of the concentration camp into my kitchen. He swore by the Soviet Union. And that's why he was locked up. And how do things look there now? Just one court trial after the other. They even kill off a couple of the best Bolsheviks every few months or so. The Nazis laugh and get a lot of fun out of it.'

'I don't believe they get so much fun out of it,' said Hans.

'Yes, yes,' said Geschke, 'I know that myself; their best comrades, those who had been longest in the Party. You can't tell – maybe they didn't shoot their best Bolshies.'

'You can say that for Mussolini too: he was an old comrade. Till he got his fill of it. Perhaps those fellows in Moscow want to clean house before there's a war.'

'When? When?' said Geschke. 'Why should there be a war? The Nazis take what they want without firing a shot: the Saar, the Rhineland, Austria, and so on and so on. I don't believe there's going to be any war.'

'What do you believe in anyway? There are a lot of things you don't believe in. I know, father, but after all there must be something you do believe in.'

A look of torment, difficult to explain, that had no connection with their conversation or with Triebel but was due to greater torments came over Geschke's grey, middle-aged face. The next moment he said calmly:

'I believe in my good sound common sense.'

'What sort of a thing is that?' said Hans, 'your good sound common sense?'

'There's no nonsense about it; that's why it's sound. It's never misled and it doesn't daydream. That's why it is just plain common sense. It doesn't worry about how where and when. . . . That's what Triebel used to worry about and that's why he's sitting now where he is.'

'My good sound common sense,' said Hans, 'always told me I would be a machinist when I finished my apprenticeship.'

'And so you will be,' said Geschke, 'in one year when you come home again. You'll have a chance to get ahead in your work before you're called up.'

'In one year when I come home, yes,' said Hans. 'This time I've caught you in a "when" for once. It's hard to get along without "whens".' He turned in amusement to his mother: 'And when I, yes, *when* I get my first pay, I'm going to buy you a scarf like Tante Emilie's, blue or green.'

Marie had listened earnestly. She said smiling: 'When you're earning money and if you still want to buy me one by that time instead of buying one for some girl, please buy me a blue one. But first, come back home.'

II

All these years Gustav Klemm had avoided having any contact with his cousin's divorced wife. As legal guardian for her son, he had arranged that his correspondence should go through the hands of his lawyer. Now, however, that his nephew was about to enter the Fuehrer's training school for young officers, he was obliged to arrange an interview with the mother in the Hotel Kaiserhof in Berlin.

Klemm had given much thought to arranging a secure future for his own sons and had discussed the matter in part with his wife. His innermost thoughts, however, he kept to himself. It seemed to him a good idea that his cousin's only son and principal heir should be fully occupied with the training his guardian had selected for him and not in a position to keep too watchful an eye on that guardian's conduct of the business in the next few years. Secretly, what Cousin Klemm wanted for his own sons was not an important political post but the management of the factory, which, with a possible war in sight, had been making money hand over fist. Though the cost of necessary expansion would not come out of the family estate, Gustav Klemm considered it his duty to curtail the payments to Potsdam, particularly as his ward's education would be taken care of apart from the family.

From the day Klemm brought Lenore home from the field hospital after World War I, Gustav Klemm had never liked her. He felt the same sense of distaste now when he saw her enter the hotel lobby. At first it struck him that she had changed very little. He had expected to find her much older, and just because the change was so slight it was all the more startling. With her light, careless movements, her weary monotonous voice, her grey eyes and her ash-blond hair she reminded him of a moth. In other respects the meeting proved to be pleasant rather than alarming. Lenore Klemm was by no means as stubborn and pugnacious as he had expected.

She listened to him quietly, holding herself erect, but instead of insisting violently on her rights she shook her head slightly. If Herr Klemm felt it was all right to arrange all contracts concerning the boy's education from his office, she had no objection at all. Long ago she had opened a bank account for her son and for a long time had been setting aside for him the money paid her from the estate, with the exception of a small amount to her aunt for their board in her house. The result was quite a considerable sum for Helmut. As things were now, she herself did not wish to make any use of this money.

Klemm was accustomed to all sorts of complicated situations and had expected to have a difficult time with Lenore. He was almost embarrassed by her words. This woman, he said to himself, is either incredibly foolish or incredibly clever. There was probably some trick about her renunciation of the money, but if so he would soon find out. He did not like her eyes any better than before. They watched him calmly, as soft and as grey as night moths. Lenore was thinking how much this man looked like her late husband, his cousin. Would Klemm have looked like that if he had lived? He had been young and handsome and brave when she fell in love with him. Or was there, even then, a latent family resemblance to his cousin which she had not seen? The cousin had the same faculty for living handsomely and getting on with all sorts of people. Meanwhile Gustav Klemm remembered his ward's complaints about the difficulty of getting his mother's permission to enter his new school. No doubt, he thought, she would have liked the boy to follow in his father's footsteps. With twinkling eyes that made him look even more like the dead man, he said:

'You must be pleased at the good reports Helmut sends us.'

'Every mother is glad when her son is happy,' Lenore replied quietly.

Klemm suppressed a smile. He would like to have ordered a Kümmel at that moment – the hotel was famous for it. But he could not order one for himself without offering Lenore one too, and that would have conflicted with his determination to keep the interview brief and businesslike.

'I almost had the impression,' he said, 'that you were disappointed he had been taken into the school. It is an honour most mothers in Germany can never hope to attain for their sons.'

She had always hoped that her son would have the same career as her own father and her brother, Lenore said. Klemm insisted eagerly:

'Not only does his education have the same advantages, but the training they give the boy fits him later to occupy the highest positions in the government.'

They were both very glad when the conversation came to an end. On the way home Lenore thought: 'I would rather not have anything to do with these people. But they have my son: I must admit it, they have him. I was happy, that time, to be allowed to keep him with me. They have taken him away from me by all sorts of devious methods. From the time he was a little boy they encouraged him in everything I was determined he should not be.'

The interview with Klemm had stirred old memories. It was only natural that the thought of Lieven, the man who had once been her husband's friend, and, for a brief space of time, her lover, should cross Lenore's mind. At home his name was never mentioned, not even when the family learned what had become of him. Lenore remembered his eyes and his voice and his hands. Individual traits were still fresh in her memory, as static, as little changed as the traits of the men and women in the novels she was always reading. Nor did those traits seem to be part of the past, a completed sequence, but rather an accompaniment to the humdrum existence she was forced to lead. She was given to daydreams in which events of the past kept pace with the meagre and painful events of the life she was now forced to lead. In them she led a detached existence in strange places among strangers; an existence subject to unknown laws in which neither her Tante Amalie nor that silly cousin Klemm, nor her son about whom she was so worried, played any part. An imaginary life is possible no doubt in books; but everyday life, with brief interruptions, goes on its way.

Young Klemm's teachers scrupulously forwarded their observations to the higher authorities. From the first he showed all the qualities his backers had predicted. Both his Youth Group and his school had unanimously testified that this boy had been drawn to National Socialism and had proved his devotion to the Party in spite of punishments, opposition at home, and prohibitions at a time when the Movement was still being reviled. He was of the stuff from which a select number of young men must be chosen, young men in whom, once they have completed their period of training, the Fuehrer could put his full trust.

The sharper the test the more keenly the boy responded. When, during military athletic contests, weighted down with a heavy pack on his shoulders he had to run over stony or swampy ground where

a misstep would have meant a serious accident, he overcame the slightest qualms of fear. And with equal ease he overcame the slightest doubts in school when he was given innumerable examples to prove that the history of nations was, in sum, the history of racial struggles. He never asked questions that would have made his teacher doubt his qualifications. And soon he had no more questions, just as he had no more fear. He longed, as everyone longs, for life to be clear and smooth and all of a piece.

At the opening lecture the S.S. officer in charge of the school began by explaining to his youthful audience that the only man who could translate the Fuehrer's commands into deeds was the man who had learned to master his own thoughts and his own muscles. The better they were able to respond to unexpected, even startling commands, so much the better would their own groups some day obey their own startling, even puzzling commands. The boy soon felt a slight contempt for people who could not and would not risk their bodies for the ideas they proclaimed.

His only worry in those weeks of probation was that he might be denied the right to promotion in the Council. Of what use that was he never asked. That question he would never have to suppress: it simply did not exist. It was as indisputable as the Fuehrer himself. To question the efficacy of the Fuehrer occurred to him as little as it would occur to a believer to question the efficacy of God, or for an archangel, winged messenger of the Lord's will, to inquire, before he flies off, whether that will is good.

In common with all young people of the day, Helmut's faith did not come straight like the Holy Ghost from Heaven, but was dependent upon certain individuals - flesh and blood instructors who handed over his creed readymade. One of them was his athletic instructor: he was responsible for Helmut's physical development. The other was his foreign-language teacher. For, after consulting his school directors, Helmut had chosen to specialize in French. The boy was immediately attracted to the athletic instructor by his gruff and taciturn manner. Helmut would have liked nothing better than to wring an exclamation of astonishment or admiration from him. For hours at a time, till they almost dropped from exhaustion, he drilled his pupils in detailed rifle exercises, then in high jumping which demanded all their courage. Helmut secretly wished he would have an accident so that this instructor would visit him in the hospital. The instructors always began their subjects with a few remarks: the athletic instructor chose fear of death as his theme. Fear of death was as little known to the ancient world in its heyday

as it was in olden times in Germany. Fear of death was a Jewish-Christian abortion that had forced itself on the Middle Ages. That was when people had been taught that they had to pay after death for the sins they had committed in life. No wonder that, in the Middle Ages, a man shrank in fear from dangerous adventures. For him it would have been a tragedy to die without absolution. Whereas for a German death on the battlefield was the only guarantee of eternal life.

One day Helmut sprained his arm and his instructor came and sat on the side of his bed for a second. The man's mocking face wore an anxious, almost tender expression. Helmut was happy when the man felt his bandage with his thin, hard hands, just as in the old days he was happy when his mother sat down beside his bed. He never thought of his mother any more. Lenore wrote to him regularly, but even reading her letters, on which she lavished so much care because they seemed her only link with her son, was merely a boring duty to him. He was even relieved when he was informed that they were not allowed to go home in the holidays.

He enjoyed the visit of the language teacher in the hospital because talking helped to pass the time. His instructor brought him Racine and Corneille; he showed him the difference between the Latin and the German sense of honour. With us devotion to the Fuehrer, with them to a vague abstract idea each man could choose as he pleased. However, there was a certain percentage of Germanic influence in this degenerate, mixed race – take, for instance, the case of Corneille. This Helmut would find out for himself. Purity of race was, to every German, a subject the French dared to portray on the stage only in a foreign setting. Racine's drama *Britannicus* was a constant reproach to the French, a race so vitiated they could not recognize their own flesh and blood any more. Then there was a Roman emperor who, with bleeding heart, cast off for reasons of state the woman he loved, a Jewess. A Frenchman could not visualize this renunciation otherwise than with a bleeding heart.

When the language instructor felt that Helmut had been fortified against any misapprehensions, he offered him, in addition, the poison which the French Revolution had inculcated in the French people. He even offered him Voltaire. For when, as directors of the school intended, the boy should go to France to study foreign cultures, when he set out on his journey the effects of the poison must be counteracted by an antidote. He had to learn beforehand the wretched Trinity of the French Revolution: Freedom, Equality and Fraternity, which the French scribbled over their walls even today.

The journey, however, did not materialize at once. In the midst of an athletic contest – the school directors laid great stress on the surprise element – the boy received orders to proceed to the village of Ense in the Ruhr with an S.S. companion who was to induct him. There he would pass the holidays in a miner's family. Helmut showed no surprise, for was he certain that, in the long run, every order could be traced to the Fuehrer, for whose benefit he was there. Ense was a little factory village in a row of similar villages all of which depended for their existence on the mines. The miner Beuer had been told in advance that he was not to show any particular consideration for the guest the Party was sending to him. And Beuer, an elderly man who had lived a long time in the same village, saw in the assignment evidence of the national unity of the Party which he had served in good times and bad. Helmut was at first a trifle embarrassed by the strange surroundings – in spite of orders Frau Beuer had hastily scrubbed and polished her little house and served a regular Sunday meal on her very best plates. That first evening the boy listened to the old man's proud tales: he had been in the procession that carried the miners' lanterns straight across Germany as a symbol on the first Nuremberg Party Day. On his return home his windows had been smashed and his wife, even his children, had jeered; for years he had been branded as having betrayed his class. Helmut became confidential and asked questions. That first evening he thought he knew what national unity really meant. At night he slept with the children in one room; it was a good bed, with plenty of covers, and, so that he should be more comfortable, the children slept all in one bed. Nevertheless the room was forlorn compared to all the rooms in which he had slept up to now. By day he worked like an ordinary labourer. He was accustomed to physical work: he was skilful and did not tire easily.

In the rest periods he drank beer with Beuer and a couple of his comrades. He paid no attention to the men who gave him sullen or sarcastic looks. The miners nudged one another: 'It's no use, keep quiet; he'll only report us if we say anything.'

A young miner offered him a drink out of his bottle. He said seriously, but with twinkling eyes:

'Are we always going to stick together?'

'Till I am sent somewhere else,' Helmut replied.

'Oh,' said the other boy, 'I thought we were always going to share everything from now on.'

Helmut heard the mockery in the words. He made a mental note to ask Beuer that very evening about the man.

In the spring he went to Paris with a group of pupils under the care of the language instructor, who was to take them to their final destination, where they would be guests in the house of a secretary to the embassy. Helmut was almost wild with excitement because now he was to see with his own eyes the nation that was their arch-enemy; the most decadent race in Europe.

He was almost disappointed because the porters looked like ordinary people, even to the red bands round their waists. Moreover they did not show any particular signs of negro blood. The streets glistened as they glided over them, polished smooth by countless motor tyres. That's what you could really call asphalt, the epitome of asphalt. You drove as fast and as silently as if you were being driven through alluring, legendary cities – through Babylon and Bagdad, if they had had motors there. The sight of the swastika on the ambassador's villa in Auteuil went straight to Helmut's heart. He shared a guest-room with his comrades. Before their arrival they had been told the object of their journey: to learn to know their new surroundings and the jargon of Paris so well that they would not be taken for foreigners. They visited the Louvre where the kings of France had collected all the splendours of the world. They drove past the Tuileries and along the Seine and through the Rue de Rivoli. Vast spaces, the instructor had explained in advance, filled with dazzling life that delighted the eye, but left the heart empty. That Helmut's eyes were satisfied, there could be no doubt. His heart was empty; he was overwhelmed. He stared and stared, but he felt terribly alone and he was homesick.

Homesick for what? He considered himself far too old to be homesick for his mother. In this oppressive foreign country he was probably homesick for his own country and his own people. He was taken to a restaurant – never had he set foot in such a restaurant in all his life. He was offered wine and food marvellous beyond his dreams; blonde women came in accompanied by negroes, two couples at a time.

The following evening he was taken into various types of houses in remote streets. 'Because our young Party members must be fully acquainted with the customs of the people who are our natural enemy.'

He stared in bewilderment at the girls: he did not know any girls like that. He felt an overwhelming disgust and he could not touch his wine. He had never had a love affair in his life. Up to now he had never known even any nice girl and certainly not any others. For him such girls were to be found only in the enemy's city, girls who

looked at men impudently and let men stare at them and drank their wine sitting on the men's knees. Such things, he thought, were possible only in a degenerate race. His body, trained by athletics and hard work, was still the same body that rowed with his school friend in the hidden cave on the lake. But his handsome head which he carried youthfully and proudly on his shoulders had been confused of late years by a narcotic poison.

Though he had learned sundry customs of this foreign race, he had not mastered the language thoroughly enough to be useful even in time of war. Suddenly he was called back home. His instructors were pleased with his reports, with his observations, with his judgment. His anticipated pleasure in his old surroundings, in the old familiar landscape was, as is usually the case with anticipated pleasures, greater than the pleasure itself. He felt a slight disillusionment, the origin of which he could not place. For the first and last time he felt in his young heart an emptiness and a chill no one could explain to him. To be sure, the next morning he was as contented as ever and, even if, as he lay in bed at night, he was astonished to find that a bit of his heart still remained chill and empty, by the time he awoke in the morning he had already grown accustomed to that astonishment. He arrived a few days before Hitler received the important visitor from London. Perhaps it'll go off without a hitch, people said; perhaps you can soon go back again. Unconsciously he longed for that more than for war. He was, therefore, almost as pleased with the result as Chamberlain when he arrived in London after his flight from Munich, and told the British people: 'I bring you peace . . .'

Not many weeks later Helmut was given a hearty welcome on his return to Auteuil.

III

Wenzlow's circumstances, by and large, might now be said to be on the sunny side of the hedge. After his promotion he was assigned a new apartment, larger and brighter. His only son, of whom he was so proud, had entered school at Easter. Everywhere he went people envied him his little daughter Marianne. His happiness with his still young and beautiful wife was such a matter of course that one could not even consider it a special piece of good luck. In his absence she had waited patiently for him and brought up his children: nor could one consider the triple task of running her house, her marriage, and her children capably and good-humouredly as a heavy duty.

The sole difficulty – it was scarcely worth mentioning – lay with the eldest daughter, Anneliese. She had started her Confirmation classes under her young school pastor, Schroeder. The classes had not met three times before Schroeder was relieved of his post. One of the mothers, who was not, to be sure, an official of the National Socialist Women's Council but was known everywhere for the excellent way in which she had brought her four well-bred children, had collected the signatures of a dozen women to a letter complaining of Pastor Schroeder to the authorities. One could not ask German mothers, so the letter ran, to sit idly by and permit their children's spiritual adviser to make remarks contrary to the ideas of the National Socialist Government. As a result, Anneliese, together with the rest of the candidates for confirmation, was now being instructed by a new school pastor. The matter was closed. The quarrel of the denominational church was one of those discords Wenzlow called headless and footless. From time immemorial he had always had a particular hatred of church fanatics. When his wife asked his advice he explained to her that certain points, even exaggerations, in spiritual questions were understandable. Under the Weimar Republic they had leaned so far to the wrong side that now they had to go to just as great extremes on the right one, to restore the balance. To be sure for some time even he had not been able to subscribe to all the principles of these German Christians; but much less would he have subscribed to the former completely godless conditions – the unchristian conduct in family and school officially permitted by the Weimar Republic. For spiritual goals were exactly the same as target practice. You have to make allowance for resistance and the force of gravity; you have to aim the shot a few points higher if you want to hit your opponent.

Anneliese, her parents learned, had gone to the deposed pastor's house in the suburbs to return a book she had borrowed. The pastor had had the impudence to lend her a second book, whereby, as they learned from closely questioning the child, he added the comment that now, before confirmation, the child's soul was open to influence as never before. He had not been ashamed – probably because he now lived alone and was shunned by all – to talk his silly twaddle to this child, his former pupil. Just as Nature follows her laws to bring the child to maturity, so God follows the law of spiritual maturity and his grace is with the child who prepares for Communion. It was, therefore, entirely his own fault, if this foolish young pastor were called to account for his presumption and made to suffer all sorts of unpleasantness, perhaps even landing in a concen-

tration camp. Ilse Wenzlow had been compelled to report the incident. Her husband, however, was not finished with the matter; he had been angry enough with the pastor and at his little daughter, and his conscience had been much disturbed. For, after all, Ilse Wenzlow had been a staunch Christian from birth. And this explained why she could not simply obey Wenzlow's order but had to reflect whether, in so doing, she was following the dictates of her conscience. It had cost her sleepless nights to square her conscience with her husband's command.

Instead of sparing her mother, the little girl proceeded to get into a new scrape. The mother realized that a man like the pastor needed only a few hours to instil the spirit of rebellion into a child. How could a little girl, such a pale, quiet little thing since this unfortunate occurrence, have hit upon an idea like that! Ilse Wenzlow often dusted her daughter's bedroom herself – fortunately, as it turned out. She did so in the first place because example is the best of teachers, and secondly, to keep an eye on the little girl's bureau drawers. There she found the forbidden book a second time, though she had promptly sent the pastor's copy back by the orderly. The little girl had then had the audacity to run off alone to the library, at God knows whose instigation, and borrow the book she was so curious about. Once again Pastor Schroeder had only himself to blame if two young women librarians were hailed before a Party court, thus bringing shame upon two respectable German families. How could she ever dream that a child of hers could be so obstinate and malicious? For it was nothing short of malicious to go off secretly and borrow a book forbidden by law, but, by some mistake, still on the shelves.

At first, Wenzlow listened quietly to the complaints. Unconsciously he began pulling apart a faded flower in the vase beside him. He himself had brought the vase from China; he often told his guests, even in the presence of his wife, that a sweetheart in China had once put this vase filled with flowers on his writing-desk. He even showed them the photograph of this Manja; it hung on the wall in a carved, lacquered frame that also held beautiful snapshots of people and scenes from the East. At such times his wife would run her hand playfully through his hair. Since that day in Tante Amalie's garden when she had first been kissed, time had not stood still for Ilse Wenzlow. She had learned much since her girlhood; now she regularly put a couple of flowers in the Chinese vase, the token of love.

Wenzlow said, softly but distinctly, because his voice was sharp and penetrating even when he tried to lower it:

'Don't be angry with me, but you allow the girl entirely too much freedom. My aunt read every book first herself before my sister had it in her hands.'

His wife said, with a touch of the ill-humour she always showed when Wenzlow held up Tante Amalie as an example:

'I'm not sure your sister gained much by such strict control.'

Wenzlow could not stand any allusion to his sister's unfortunate marriage. He went on more sharply:

'One should never criticize the government in the presence of children. I myself have sometimes had to overlook a smile from visitors, from comrades, even from you. Now I realize my mistake. We must not forget for a second what Hitler has done for us. Every one of his Party measures had so far resulted in raising the prestige of our nation in the whole world. Some of those measures no doubt we did not fully understand at first. The events of this year would have been impossible if we had not carried them out strictly. Foreign governments even feel that we are defending the principles on which their own cultures rest. We have the strength they lack. They realize that it is wiser to preserve that "degenerate, conglomerate mass, the Germans", as a buffer between them and Asia. And nations like Austria welcome us with cheers and delight; that is why Vienna sighed with relief when we marched in.'

Ilse Wenzlow said, a trifle impatiently, a little surprised at her husband's unaccustomed loquacity:

'I must confess I don't quite understand the connection between the occupation of Vienna and the Sudetenland and this impudent child's obstinacy.'

'It's harder for you women to think beyond your four walls than it is for us. Lieutenant-Colonel Guenther is leaving in a day or so for the Eastern frontier. He has been appointed to the Staff. I am on such good terms with Guenther that I can count on his sending for me to follow him. And if that happens there must not be the slightest official obstacle in the way.'

'What sort of an obstacle do you mean?'

'Through her stupidity the child can get us classed among families in which an irresponsible person is guilty of an act against the State.'

The only person who slept calmly that night in Wenzlow's apartment was his little son. Anneliese knelt on her younger sister's bed. Through the crack in the door she could hear every word: the smaller girl tried at first to listen but sleepiness overcame her curiosity. Though Anneliese almost stuck her ear through the door crack for

two whole minutes, she could not hear a sound. 'So I'm now an enemy of the State,' thought the child. Her father's words must have made a tremendous impression on her mother. Ilse Wenzlow said finally:

'What shall we do?'

'Drive to the post office. I'll send a night letter to Tante Amalie. Luckily she is very fond of the child. These unfortunate incidents will be best forgotten if the child is out of the way for a while.'

Anneliese heard a chair pulled back and knew that her father had left the room. She slipped into her bed quick as a flash. Her mother went into the little boy's bedroom. She ran her hand tenderly over his fair hair; she always felt comforted when she stood at the bedside of her little son who had never given her a moment's worry, as if she felt that he never could give her one.

The answer from Potsdam came so quickly that the mother packed the child's suitcase herself. She was to take the morning train to Berlin. Anneliese's only personal possession which she guarded strictly from the eyes of the world was a little leather book Pastor Schroeder had given her when she was ill. Refusing to let her beloved present be sullied even by curious glances, she had hidden it under her mattress and later in the hem of a rug. The girl was thin, her breast so flat and her dress so full that it was a simple matter to hide the little book in her bodice. She looked up sullenly at her father when he planted a hasty good-bye kiss on her forehead.

As he went down the steps Wenzlow thought: 'Whatever has got into that girl? She has a lot of stubbornness and a lot of strength. She hardly gets it from her mother; that's a Wenzlow trait.' As he walked along he felt sorry that he would not see her again for many weeks.

Ilse Wenzlow went as far as the train with her daughter. On the way she avoided speaking. As she bade her good-bye she said: 'I hope we hear only good of you.'

At heart the child was glad to get away from her family. Before the train left she had a strange meeting. Pastor Schroeder, the crux of the trouble, arrived at the station accompanied by two watchful officials who were taking him on the same train to a hearing in Berlin. No one could have told from the appearance of two men with him that they were from the Gestapo. The girl's sharp eyes recognized Pastor Schroeder while he was still some distance away and she pushed towards him through the dense crowd of passengers. Events that change one's whole life, such as an arrest, can either break people or bring out their unsuspected strength. The police

officials did not notice that Schroeder's eyes, deep and burning, met and held the calm, curious glance of a child swinging her two pig-tails in the crowd of passengers. The girl would have rushed up to her teacher if he had not quickly made her a sign to stay away. Then at last she saw that the two men with him had unmistakably seized him under the arms. Deeply upset, the girl realized at once – for these were not ordinary times – what the men were and where they were taking him. They were so close to one another that she caught the words Schroeder seemed to be saying to himself: 'I'm worried about you, my child.' He added softly: 'Matthew eight, two.' The next moment the two men walked him away and into a compartment of the train.

Anneliese was met at the Berlin station by Lenore, whom the children called 'their real aunt', because she was their father's sister. Lenore had expected that the girl would immediately explain her sudden arrival. But as the child chattered happily about unimportant matters she asked no questions. She is too young to be involved in a love affair, Lenore thought to herself in the local train. What can have happened to make my good brother send that night letter?

At home Tante Amalie was even less inclined to question her niece. It was not seemly, she held, to ask pointed questions of one's nearest friends, old or young, if they did not feel a desire to confide of their own accord. Such a need, however, seemed to her basically bad form: something disorganized, unrestrained, an overstepping of the barriers God had placed round everyone's innermost being.

That is why she was displeased when one morning, as they were cleaning silver together in the kitchen, Anneliese opened her heart. The girl told her the whole story in detail, ending with the meeting with Pastor Schroeder at the station. Tante Amalie ordered her to polish the knife carefully. Years ago, when her nephew insisted upon giving her a little money from his travelling allowance, she had added to her modest provision of silver by a fortunate purchase of silver-plated knives and forks. And if this silver-plating was to last each piece must be polished with care.

Then, with a stern glance at the girl's face that looked overheated and agitated, in its scanty frame of freshly plaited pigtails, she said:

'How dare you use such words in speaking of your parents? Your father would never do anything in his life that was not thoroughly honourable.' She thought: 'Who has taught the child to think such thoughts? A school pastor who encourages a child to criticize its own father has not fulfilled his duty.'

She gazed out through the kitchen window into the late autumnal garden. In memory she saw her nephew in the lilacs with his fiancée – their engagement not yet announced, but secretly approved by both families – the neighbour's daughter, the little Malzahn, now Frau von Wenzlow and the mother of three children. The eldest daughter's way of thinking might seem the opposite of straightforward and open, but, as Tante Amalie stood at her kitchen window looking out into the garden, she had a sudden glimpse of the course of life which is not always straightforward and open either. The little girl rubbed one fork after the other violently. She answered impetuously:

'Yes, of course, Tante Amalie. Father would never do anything that seemed to him dishonourable, but do you believe, Tante, that everything he thinks honourable really is?'

'What do you mean by that?' asked her aunt, alarmed. 'I refuse to answer that question. A child should not judge her father.'

The girl wrinkled her forehead and finished her work in silence. Since her last visit she had firmly believed that she had found in this old lady a sort of refuge. Now she realized that she was not in such good hands here as she had hoped.

She thought: 'My aunt might tell my father. That's why Schroeder said: "I'm worried about you."'

That evening the three – the child, Lenore and Tante Amalie – went to call on their neighbours, the Malzahns. Tante Amalie had almost forgiven the girl because she realized, from her expression, that the child still looked upon her and not her grandmother Malzahn, as the head of the family. Her sharp eyes recognized the true family conditions beneath the outward relationships. This comforted Amalie Wenzlow even for the sorrow that forty years ago had embittered her. How gay, how fresh, how much in love the newly-married Frau von Malzahn had been as she strolled about in the next-door garden while she, Amalie, tied to her duties, brought up her brother's children! Now everything was all right. In spite of their violent disagreement, her nephew's eldest daughter looked upon her, and not old Frau von Malzahn, as the head of the family, though the latter had welcomed her granddaughter lovingly.

Young Stachwitz – he was still called that – sat as a guest at the table beside Lenore Klemm. Lenore's sad, dreary face looked younger and more cheerful when Stachwitz was present. 'We two would have come together, if things had been different,' they probably thought now and then. Stachwitz had no complaint about his pretty, gay little wife. Lenore was seldom in his thoughts and then

only fleetingly. She put her hand on his arm. The idea that they would have suited each other, if things had worked out, excited her more than usual. Stachwitz was on leave. The events of the past year, even his latest promotion, had not taught him to conceal the thoughts he expressed in the Malzahn house more freely than elsewhere. After a careful glance at Anneliese – she struck him as too young to understand what he was about to say – he related an ambiguous conversation he had overheard. His brother officers had all been delighted when the Germans crossed the frontiers at several points – a move directly contrary to the Munich Agreement.

The return to the Reich, said Stachwitz, was a wonderful idea, comprehensible and self-evident; the return to the Reich of every family, every village, every province indubitably German. If that was the plan, then one could only thank Hitler. That was what the army was for to carry out a plan like that to the minute, to the last word. The army did not suffer from megalomania nor was it led astray by lust for power. This return to the Reich was justifiable; it was a prerequisite for peace. But when people began to feel too confident, when megalomania and lust for power became the driving factors, that meant preparation for war.

He spoke faster and at greater length than usual. All eyes were turned towards him. Even Frau von Malzahn looked at him a second in surprise with her anxious and, at the same time, trusting eyes.

'You're a funny boy, Stachwitz,' said old Major von Malzahn. 'What have you got against war? It's our profession after all.'

Stachwitz shot him a quick glance. He was about to reply, but controlled himself. Instead he described the enthusiasm at the time of the entrance into the Sudetenland: the only opposition had been a solitary shot from a Czech peasant in a village they had not known was occupied. The foreign population had been apathetic and kept in the background, with the single exception of that one peasant. There had been an embarrassing incident. The army S.S. had shot him before they had had time to question him. He had lain there, his brains rolling out of his skull till someone came and carried him off. The population had been forbidden to touch him. They stood around at a distance of ten yards or so and stared at him.

No one at the table spoke. Anneliese's voice rang out clearly:

'Didn't anyone really touch him?'

'What do you think?' said Stachwitz, smiling. 'The place was occupied by the army. And German soldiers with guns in their hands encircled the people.'

The little girl picked at the food on her plate. She thought, a few

weeks ago the question of war or peace had convulsed the world. Everybody she knew had been happy or fearful, excited or depressed: her father's friends and her own, shopkeepers and people in the markets, teachers and pupils, even the Hitler Youth in which she no longer played as important a part as before, but had still a certain standing because of her former services. Her father had hardly come home at all and the muscles in his cheek never stopped twitching. She had realized from his excitement and a certain tenderness she had never noticed before in her mother's voice and eyes that something tremendous was about to happen, something different from anything that she could visualize; something to hope for and to fear. It would be Good and Evil in one, at once the worst and the most wonderful. Then suddenly, her father's muscles had stopped twitching. One day he came back home at an unusual hour; he had not called out – peace. He had shouted: 'No war!' They had all been horribly disappointed and horribly relieved. The tenderness vanished from her mother's eyes and words. They had joked about foreign nations and statesmen who broke old agreements out of fear and gave Hitler everything he demanded. Her father's cheek muscles began to twitch again only when the dreadful thing happened in his own family. The situation in the family had almost made the child forget the world outside. Now, however, as she listened to Stachwitz's story she recalled her parents' words which she had overheard at night from her sister's bed through the crack in the door. But what had Anneliese's impudence to do with the Sudetenland? True, her father had not been so positive as Stachwitz was today that the return of the Reich was the end of the story and that they would not some day have to experience the thing that was terrible and wonderful in one.

Then her thoughts went back to the Czech peasant. The mass of brain hung from the skull; the people had not touched him because German soldiers were watching. She saw the giant shadows of the German soldiers on the white market place, as if her plate were the white market place, the crumbs she was picking at the shadows of German soldiers. She felt the magnitude of power. What were the people staring at from ten metres away? The dead peasant. What did that mean, dead? If Schroeder were right, his soul was no longer in his body, no matter how hard they might stare. What was the soul? The mass of brain on the outside of the dead man's skull? No, that was not the soul.

She looked round uneasily: she did not know whom she could ask in this room. She was not even very sure what she wanted to ask.

The room where she was sitting, the whole family, the whole house, the whole of life – everything called for so many questions that it was impossible to choose the right one. She had been transplanted into an impenetrable wilderness; a white, embroidered tablecloth, the table set for guests, on which at this moment Grandmother Malzahn was setting a crystal bowl with a compote of fruit from the garden.

That evening Tante Amalie was surprised when Anneliese asked whether there was a Bible in the house – a strange but certainly not inadmissible question. After a slight hesitation she said: 'Of course, my child,' and brought out the family heirloom which her own mother had brought into the house; the mother, too, of that Wenzlow who had retired early and had made his children's lives miserable. The girl listened patiently to the family stories about the former Bible-owner who seemed to her more completely dead than her father's dead mother. At night in bed she looked up the text Schroeder had mentioned at the station. That was probably it: 'Fear not, for I am with you.' She thought: 'I'm not a bit afraid; I would not be afraid even if I were alone.' On the inside cover she found a thin spidery handwriting: 'For my dear daughter, Amalie.' She thought: 'Is it possible that Tante Amalie was ever a girl my age? Was she ever some mother's daughter?' She turned out the light. Was there someone who could see in the dark, straight into her heart so that she was not alone even now? As she fell asleep she was grateful for the narrow strip of light under the door of her Aunt Lenore, who was still awake, still reading.

IV

Lieven had become as accustomed to plane trips as if he had spent his whole life flying among the clouds. No longer did he have to make an effort to hide his astonishment. Nothing seemed astonishing any more – except that he flew to Berlin now and then and lived in Riga where he was director of a bank branch. He had a flat, a whole floor in the house belonging to the manager of a firm that controlled the most extensive lumber contracts in the country and supplied paper factories in the West. The firm had been founded several generations before by the owner's own family. He was not in the least annoyed that Lieven's flat soon became a gathering place for Germans; particularly as Lieven's callers proved to be consular, embassy and Party officials, connections obviously exceeding the obligations of a bank director. Lieven's landlord, with his wife and children, attended the German church; he sent the children

to German schools; he considered it his duty, he told Lieven, to use his modest influence wherever possible to prevent the homeland from falling under the power of the Soviets. His grandfather had in his time been active in keeping the Jews out of his lumber business; even under the Czars that had been difficult; now with this business with the Soviets it was impossible. What was needed here was race protection as the Germans understood it today. He was glad to be of assistance to his tenant wherever he could. He was well aware what role Lieven's family had played before the Russian Revolution; and he was apologetic about the confiscation of German estates his government had been obliged to carry out after the war. His poor country could exist only through help from strong neighbours. That is why it would have been better for the country to continue under the protection of old and powerful families than to be completely ruined by a miserable and illiterate race.

With mingled scorn and amusement, Lieven noticed how zealously the man identified the hands into which various portions of the Lieven estate had fallen: two or three village parishes, a few pieces to small artisans; a tract of woodland had become public domain. The main buildings were temporarily inhabited by a wealthy local merchant. The landlord went to as much trouble to get all the details as if he were trying to trace his own estate. He himself was interested in the woodland: his firm had made an offer for it some years ago. As the government now controlled that lumber, and to a lesser degree the merchant in the manor house, this was his only connection with the Lieven family estate. But this slender tie impelled him to look into relationships of which even Lieven was ignorant.

As Lieven was obliged to make frequent business trips to Berlin, he kept his room on the Kurfürstendamm. One evening, as he entered the hall leading to his apartment, he was surprised to smell cigarette smoke. As he walked in he saw his guest in an armchair in the corner. He laughed.

'You don't seem to know that German women don't smoke,' he said.

For answer Elisabeth Lieven blew intricate smoke spirals through her nose.

'And don't use lipstick,' he added.

Her lips were a shade redder than he remembered and she had carefully powdered her face to erase all traces of weariness. He was quick to notice her easy, erect carriage, which was still the same, and a grey dress he thought he recognized which emphasized her

beautiful figure. There again, reminding him of home, were the earrings inherited from her mother, and the slightly scornful note in her retort:

'I certainly won't smoke half so much if you are free this time to take me out.'

'It will give me the greatest pleasure,' he said.

'Have you a moment to spare?' Elisabeth asked. 'We can talk better here. It is so long since we have seen each other. Since my brother died I scarcely ever get away from Dresden.'

Lieven gave her a long, searching look. The feigned lightness with which she spoke, the exaggerated casualness all meant that she had something important to say. He pulled up a chair and sat down beside her. He clasped her hand and with his free one took her cigarette away and put it between his own lips. She looked at him attentively.

'You don't look so bad, my friend, my cousin. Even a little better than I remembered you after such a long time.' They sat looking at each other steadily, unsmiling, staring into each other's eyes at close range. Her eyes were as cold as his - there was no hint of warmth in either of them.

'Well, then, what's up, Landgravine Elisabeth?'

'That's rather a nice title. I like it. I've forgotten all about the lady, though I studied her in school.'

'I believe your namesake was a lady in the Middle Ages. Her husband, I think, was a wicked tyrant. If I remember rightly he even forbade your namesake to distribute gifts among the poor in her land of Thuringia. But she went ahead and did it just the same, and when he met her carrying her breadbasket she lied to him and told him there were only roses in it. Of course, the wicked Landgraf did not believe her, but when he looked into her basket the usual miracle occurred: the bread was changed to roses.'

'Very sensible of God,' said Elisabeth, 'only if your Elisabeth had been as clever as I am she would have put a couple of roses on top of the bread beforehand. However, a miracle is always more fun. Now please let go of my hand! I want to light a cigarette. My dear Ernst, I want to ask you something important - well, of course, let's not exaggerate - something fairly important. I hear you have a decent job up there.'

He let go of her hand. He raised his eyebrows. She puffed at her cigarette.

'I'd like awfully to pay you a visit some time,' she said. 'I'd love to see the place again where I was always happy as a child.'

'That can easily be arranged,' said Lieven.

'Especially if you agree to my suggestion. I have a proposition to make to you now: don't be frightened, please.'

He pushed back his chair a little and looked at her sharply. He had the curious impression that he was looking closely at his own reflection. Suddenly the reflection lowered her eyes. He laughed and said: 'I honestly don't know anything I'm afraid of – certainly not a proposition from you. It must be a very strange one.'

'I think it is. How would it be if we two should get married?'

'My God, Elisabeth!' he exclaimed. 'You and I! But why?'

'We Lievens belong together,' she said. 'Just think! Suppose I should be stuck here in Germany for ever and you, far away, up there in our home. One of these days the estate will come to you.'

'That's a crazy proposition, but not so alarming after all. I don't think we have anything in common. Nor do I think I can ever fall in love with you any more. I don't think you can fall in love with me either: that's all over long ago.'

'Oh, Ernst dear, does one absolutely have to fall in love?'

'It's customary as a rule.'

'Yes, but you and I have always taken pains to avoid the general custom.'

'And then, Elisabeth, perhaps you would be happy for a while up there; for a couple of years maybe – how can I tell? But that particular corner will be the worst spot in Europe if war comes. You must be prepared for that.'

'But people say everything has been done to assure lasting peace. Ministers return home from your conferences, step out of their planes and call to their people that they are bringing them "peace in our time".'

'My dear, it's quite possible we'll have to fight the Soviets some of these days. And our old home up there can be a pretty hot corner.'

'But when?'

'Certainly in our lifetime; before we die.'

'Oh dear Ernst, who wants to think everything out beforehand? Why should we die?'

'I have heard it said that it can happen.'

'Oh Ernst, that was just the warmongers again. But even if you are right – I'd much rather die at home than here.'

He sat thinking it over and failed to notice that her expression was a shade warmer. She waited a second for his answer. As none came she jumped up.

'In the meantime I'll go and put on a sensible dress, in case you haven't changed your mind about spending the evening with me.'

He shook his head. 'I never regret anything. I imagine that all my life I shall spend my evenings with anyone I choose; even occasionally with you.'

'Of course,' she said. 'I shall always wait patiently. You wouldn't force me to have free evenings, I hope. For my part, you see, I have had so much freedom ever since I was a little child, that I am bored stiff with it.' Then standing in front of the mirror while he waited, behind her, she said: 'We make a handsome couple, don't we?'

For the rest of the evening she did not mention the subject again. They were both relieved, as they left the building, to meet a couple of his S.S. friends who joined them for a cheerful dinner at the same table, thus saving them from an awkward tête-à-tête. Lieven noticed that his friends admired Elisabeth extravagantly. He looked at her sharply; but he remained silent under her gay bantering replies that kept his companions in a gale of laughter. Later he managed cleverly for them all to see Elisabeth off on the night train. Not once did her eyes or her hand seek his, nor did she try to get a word alone with him. No decision was reached that evening.

He certainly had no desire to write to her. He was surprised at himself when a few weeks later he told his landlord: 'On my next trip I'll bring my wife back here with me.'

The landlord almost died of curiosity. Herr Lieven had not given him an inkling. Had he been married just recently or for a long while? Or was he just about to be married?

Lieven did not explain; but he roused the man's curiosity even further with casual remarks about the young wife who came from his own family, had been born in this part of the world and lived here as a child – in the deliberate hope that this man's praiseworthy connection with the various affairs of the Lieven family might quickly bear fruit. The man was delighted to be allowed to have a hand in the matter. He arranged that Lieven could visit the estate which the present owner occupied at rare intervals only in the summer. For Lieven had made up his mind to surprise his wife with this present as a welcome home.

The moment she received the letter, warning her without preamble, not to be disappointed, Elisabeth knew that there was not enough time to rebuild, that Lieven had thought over her proposition and accepted it.

v

In Paris, in despair and rage, a young Jew shot and killed a certain Ernst von Rath, third secretary at the German Embassy. Early

the next morning, November 10th, all roving commandos and S.A. groups were turned loose on a Jew hunt.

'Number Seventeen! Stop!' The garden gate was locked and bolted. The iron rods behind the diagonal braces did not yield to the furious blows. Becker said: 'The thugs have barricaded themselves in well.' Langhorn said: 'No wonder; they know what's in store for them.' The group conferred as to whether it would be better to force the locks and iron bars, or to storm the barbed-wire-covered walls. Their arrival had been the signal for the furious barking of dogs inside the garden – and they were keeping it up. Franz Geschke put his thumb on the bell and kept it there. The white house with the closed blinds glistened behind magnolia trees, their black-gnarled branches autumnally bare. Though it was November, the wide drive of reddish sand, leading to the garage, was littered with freshly fallen leaves. The glass veranda which ran round half the house had been emptied for winter of all its furniture but the gay, curiously-shaped lamps that looked festive, almost summery, between the slender mellowed columns.

'We'll bust those funny things up there in a thousand pieces the very first thing,' thought Hagedorn.

'By God, they haven't got a bad place here,' said Wirth.

Franz Geschke said: 'They probably thought we'd let 'em keep their dens of lust open a long time.'

Franz had completed his military service. It was a disappointment to him that instead of marching right off to war and helping to occupy foreign countries, where he would be looked upon with fear and awe, he had had to go home again and eat at the same kitchen table with his father and mother. True, he was a little relieved to be able to see his girl again and all the good old familiar objects and places which, in spite of everything, a fellow clings to when there is a chance, as in war, that he may never see them again. His older S.A. comrades had set him straight on these matters again.

Still keeping his thumb on the bell, he looked at the veranda, at the wrought-iron railing in the inner garden gate, the wide winged-shaped stairs in baroque style and the countless window-blinds all as hermetically sealed as the garden gate. He tried to work out what all those things must cost. 'No wonder the owner can't sleep for worry,' he thought. 'No wonder he locks himself in to keep the masses out.' To own even one of the appurtenances of this villa, for instance, the bronze Viecher on their pedestals to the right and left of the stairs he himself would certainly have had to work for the rest of his days. He enjoyed in advance the crash when he would swing a

chair leg into those damned chandeliers, the crack of the thin carved pillars, the shattering of all the crazy fiddle-faddle the damned Jews had hoarded out of the blood and sweat of people like himself. But most of all he looked forward to the fulfilment of his secret desire: the confiscation of the owner's property.

At the last moment Langhorn had an idea.

'Listen here! Keep whatever they've got inside in the way of so-called art separate from all the other loot. We'll leave that to one side, have it valued and take it to a museum. It's all stolen anyhow, it's all government property.'

Wirth quickly added: 'How can you tell what's government property? That's up to you, Erbenbeck.'

Young Erbenbeck understood his superior officer's tone perfectly. 'He's probably thinking,' he said to himself, 'Now we'll see if this fellow behaves properly today. But he's on the wrong track if he thinks I still have any leaning towards that aristocratic mumbo-jumbo.' He waited impatiently for Langhorn to show that he, in particular, knew what this day meant.

Franz Geschke finally took his thumb off the bell. Now the maid appeared, as small and slender and attractive as a maid in an operetta, tripping down the main staircase between the balustrades with their baroque ornaments. She had not yet realized the seriousness of the situation. She called a few cheery words to the dogs chained below the steps – they were still barking furiously. They quieted down for the moment. Then she came, tripping quickly on her long, slender, rayon-covered legs, through the garden to the gate.

'How does that nice blonde girl come to be in a house like this,' thought Franz Geschke. 'It's been forbidden for some time. Her black taffeta dress and her little white apron cost more money than my best girl's Sunday dress.'

The little maid called out pleasantly: 'Heil Hitler!' and added with a touch of *naïveté*: 'What's going on so early in the morning?'

'I'd like to give her a whirl,' thought Franz Geschke. 'What's she doing around here anyway? Did she get those earrings from the Jew?'

'Open up!' he shouted. She shrugged her shoulders in amusement. She swung the bunch of keys from her wrist and looked up with bright blue astonished eyes as the S.A. boys rushed past her the moment the gate was unlocked. 'My God,' she cried, in mock surprise at Franz Geschke's strained, scowling face: 'What's going on anyway?'

'Save your breath, girl, you can guess what's up today. How did you get into this Jew stable anyway?'

'How did I come here? What do you mean by Jew stable? Oh yes! Oh yes! You probably want to get in to the Jews. They live in Seventeen A, over there behind that plot of ground. They changed the number in October. We're just plain seventeen. We've just hauled down the flag at our house because we're waiting for the painters. That's why everything is cleared out and the Herr Gauleiter Haehnisch has gone away with his whole family to get rid of the mess and the stink of paint.'

Franz Geschke shouted:

'You heard, fellows, Seventeen A, to the right around the grass plot.'

He felt a vague anxiety deeper than usual when he had made mistakes or official blunders in the past. He wasted no more glances, no more words on the stupid maid on whom he had vented his rage to no purpose. With all her damned master's residence, with its lamp-decorated veranda and its garage drive strewn with red sand and its silly barking dogs! Taking a deep breath – he could not afford to waste any of his costly rage foolishly – he rushed off after his men.

No. 17a, the Rothschilds' house, lay behind its garden just as white and as silent as the house at No. 17. It had the same reddish sand on the same drive. Here there was no veranda with gay lamps, but a balcony with glass windows. Franz Geschke did not waste any more time on details. He shouted: 'In we go!' He did not even stop to press his thumb on the doorbell. With all his weight he hurled his body against the garden gate. It promptly cracked and gave way.

VI

Christian Nadler usually delivered and collected his shoes on Sunday mornings, because then the farmers were at home, and afterwards he could go straight to church. During the service he left his bundle of shoes with the inn-keeper at the 'Eiche'. He had not been near his brother's farm for a long, long time – at first lest his brother should have a belated attack of rage, but finally out of habit, when he realized that time had dissipated his brother's anger.

On his return home he sat down with his dog on the landing. Christian shared his food with this dog; but he did not make the dog jump for the food bit by bit or smell out a piece of sausage which

he then had to earn by sitting up and begging. No, Christian shared his food with his four-legged friend as generously as with one of his own kind. When both had had enough, the dog would place his two paws on Christian's knee and Christian would scratch his throat. The dog would point his ears and raise his clear, golden yellow eyes to Christian's worried face.

'What do you think is going to happen, Widu?' asked Christian. 'The eldest boy will finish his military service in the autumn; but the egghead, our Karl, has joined the ranks. It'll be two years before we see him again. How do you like that, Widu?'

The dog licked his face carefully. He knew better than anyone else on earth the long, thin lines in Christian's face. He licked them clean with his raw tongue.

'Me, Widu, I don't like it at all. If Hitler began gobbling up one piece of sausage after the other, would you like that? Not me. The people, they say, are afraid he'll bite and that's why they let him gobble. Well, they can't take the sausage out of his sharp teeth. At first it was only a small piece. Now it's the whole sausage.'

When he finished licking the lines on Christian's face, the dog began licking his hands. His bright eyes were close to his master's damp face.

'Yes, Czecho-Slovakia,' said Christian, 'and Danzig and Memel. That's what the countries and cities are called; they answer to their names the way you answer to the name Widu. They are called on the radio through the air, and they call back. They threaten Hitler if he doesn't stop. Did you ever know a dog stop eating because someone threatened him? He's more likely to jump at your throat.'

The dog watched him, motionless, with teeth bared and shining eyes. 'Widu, I can't see how it is all going to end. Wilhelm thinks other people are always as stupid as he is. I think now and then there's a fellow as smart as you and me. I don't know how it's going to end; I don't like it at all.' He pushed the dog away from him; he was too lazy to play with him. As good luck would have it, it was Sunday and, fortunately, it was not the custom to break the Sabbath peace with work. He had never been one to exert himself and no work at all was even better than easy work.

That steamer loaded with trippers going upstream in the sunshine was certainly 'Strength Through Joy'. What sort of people were they with all their bag and baggage? Christian liked best to think about people when they were not in front of him. He would never see any of those people face to face; one of them would be sure to fall ill and die soon. Now he was travelling on the steamer,

'Strength Through Joy', and did not know what awaited him. And there was certainly a woman or two among them who would have a child this year; certainly there was someone sad and someone very happy. Why? He, Christian, would never know. What a funny ship! The beautiful steamer drew a long wake through the water. If all ships' wakes could stay in the water, then the whole ocean would be full of wrinkles. How does the wind manage to bend all the branches of the big ash-tree to one side except for the one forked branch that leans to the opposite side? Why did that branch lean in just that direction? Why did the wind lose its strength when it came to just this branch? It annoyed Christian that he could not keep on dreaming calmly on sunny Sunday, spinning one thread after the other just as his thoughts came into his head. But he had one thought that kept tearing the threads, so that they never became a web. He liked to think only about things you could see with your eyes. However, that thought, crawling around inside his head, finally burst the web asunder. He did not really miss the boy, the egghead, Karl. The last time he was at home Christian had not even talked with him. He had seen him only on rare occasions and then from afar. Therefore, he could not be said to miss him. But he had always been able to think this Karl was somewhere about. Even when he himself, Christian, was no longer there, the boy would still be there. The lake would be there and the ash-tree with the forked branch, and the flock of birds and above all the boy, who vouched for everything just by being there. He, Christian, could sleep his eternal sleep in peace for everything would go on without him. Karl would plough the piece of land Christian had wrenched away from his brother. So far everything had gone smoothly. He had been sharp about getting the best of Wilhelm. Even if he wasn't strong enough to hit a fellow, at least he could outwit him. But a man couldn't get the better of the government even when he wasn't strong enough to hit 'em. The government had taken the boy away right in front of his eyes. God knows when he would see him again. Since Karl had been in the army he had tried to find out what they intended to do with him there. Christian had not attached any importance to the boy's outings with the Hitler Youth all these years. As a boy he himself had done a bit of roaming, the devil knows where and with whom, but in the end a fellow calms down. Till recently this thought had comforted him. But now that they had the boy fast on the string, the prospect was not quite so pleasing. Now they could use him for their maddest crimes.

He listened to the gossip of the men who brought him their worn

shoes. At first their excitement had amused him. Now they talked about crimes that were being committed against German nationals in Pitschi and Witschi and Tschitschi or whatever those Polish nests were called. Well, if they got so upset over crimes committed against German nationals, he could have invited them once upon a time to a certain little scene on his dock. He would like to have heard the uproar and he would have looked on calmly at the course of the world from his three-legged stool if only Karl had not got mixed up in it. He was sure to have learned all sorts of rascally tricks with his Hitler Youth. He, Christian, had also learned all sorts of rascally tricks in his day – till his hip had been shot away; then he had lost all desire for them. He had paid dearly for his experience. But this long-legged, straight-backed boy must not have to pay so dearly. It struck him that the peasants who came to him with their worn-out shoes gave too little thought to their boys, even though they worked with them in the fields, went with them to the tavern and to church, ate and drank with them and after the day's work slept with them under the same roof. But he, so he believed, worried more about his, though the only tie was his glimpse of the boy and the bundle of papers the lawyer had straightened out for him. He thought: 'Who knows, perhaps they worry and fret too. Why should they complain about that to me? I don't complain about anything to them.'

With Widu it was different. Those yellow stars hidden by the shaggy hair were the only pair of eyes to which Christian could confidently pour out his troubles.

'How do you like this new turn of affairs, Widu? I don't like it at all. What sort of friendship is that? Can you make anything of it? I told you once about the fellow they dragged down on the bridge one night after they had bound his legs with our wire in our shack so he'd be sure to drown. I told you about that. Can you imagine them pulling him out again and begging his pardon, Widu? Can you imagine them rubbing his legs with spirits and laying him out in the sun to dry? Not I. I can only think, that among the crowd, there might be one of them conceited enough to think the other fellow must be just as stupid as he is.'

He shook off the dog so roughly that it growled, more in surprise than in anger. Christian began hammering wildly, though he always hated any exertion – especially on Sunday.

A few days later, as he lay on his bed, Christian reached out his arm and turned on the radio. His first thought was: 'There you are! Didn't I say so?' Though he had not yet understood the words, he

knew by the mere tone at this unusual hour – earnest, solemn, awe-inspiring – that it could only mean one thing. That tone he had heard only once in his life, not over the radio in his shack, but from a balcony on a square, a soft and hallowed note to make the human heart tremble with fear. Then, as today, that tone meant war. Whether it came from a strong voice within hearing distance, or from the heavens on the trumpets of archangels, or on the air over antennae . . . it still meant war. Christian let out a string of curses and turned the radio off in a rage. ‘Now they’ve got him!’ he thought. To Christian it was all one – the war they had been so set on having and Karl who would have to fight with them. They’d send him straight from manoeuvres to the battlefield. ‘You come back to me safe and sound, if you know what’s good for you,’ he thought menacingly. He himself was rid of the whole business for good and all. All of a sudden he went about limping worse than usual. ‘Let those stupid farmers give me pitying looks,’ he thought. ‘Just wait till they know what’s ahead of them. The other time, too, we thought the whole thing was just a joke in the beginning.’

When farmers met him they said: ‘It’ll all be over soon. So you needn’t be sorry you can’t go too, Christian.’

‘It all depends,’ he replied.

Farmer Uhl, who looked like a radish, said: ‘They say it’ll soon be all over; that’s what they said before, too. You don’t have to go in any case, Christian; you’re really lucky.’

‘It all depends,’ said Christian.

Fifteen

I

SINCE THE DAY the Germans marched through Poland conquering the country in a few weeks, Wilhelm Nadler had been a changed man. Not even his wife Liese knew what to make of him. She thought she had learned to know all sides of him in the course of their married life. She had seen him wildly happy, full of fight and roaring drunk; she knew how he bragged when he was sober and

looked back on better days; she knew his wild, terrifying boasts when he was drunk and looked into the future. She knew his long-winded stories inside and out, when he came home from festivals, from S.A. meetings and from Party Days, as well as his curses and threats when things went wrong. Through all his swearing and bragging there ran one name as if, without that name round which his enthusiasms had centred for years, his life had no value, and were neither abominable or praiseworthy. In the beginning Hauptmann Degenhardt's name had been constantly on his lips in the tavern, at work, or when buying or selling. Nadler's commanding officer directly after the war when he served in the Freikorps, he had kept bobbing up again, never, to be sure, in person – since the Kapp Putsch he had disappeared completely – but as a memory to which Nadler was constantly comparing other men. To hear her husband talk, Liese might have thought that life under this man had been entirely different; under his command everything had gone off brilliantly. Then this Degenhardt had faded out like a star. Freiherr von Ziesen rose to take his place. Liese had been treated to a feeble imitation of the Baron's speeches, even to a detailed description of his outward appearance. By the time he finally called at their farm – the time Wilhelm was shot during the S.A. action – Ziesen's star was already on the wane at least in Wilhelm's mind. As to the Baron, he had pulled himself and his estate on the opposite side of the lake out of debt long after the Stahlheim had been forbidden and Wilhelm had become a member of the Nazi Party. Since then Harms from the next village had become Nadler's guiding star. And this particular star was not unknown to Liese. She had seen him about for years before he acquired such amazing glory.

However, since the war Wilhelm had changed completely. His eyes gleamed: he was much more excited and restless; he laughed and sighed differently, he even grabbed Liese differently. You might have thought he was twenty years younger when for instance, he read something in the newspaper that excited him. While his neighbours had ploughed and sowed, as if life were going to go on in the same old way for ever, Nadler had been secretly waiting for war. He had never been able to believe that this and nothing else was his life. He could not see himself as a poor hardworking farmer, eking out a miserable existence. Now men would be called to the flag; now people would see what sort of a man he really was.

At first Liese felt only his disappointment. Both boys were in the army: why hadn't they called him up at once? When Poland was overrun even faster than he would have dared to dream, his dis-

appointment turned to fear. Perhaps they would even make peace before he could get into the war! The eldest boy wrote triumphantly that the advance into Poland had been mere child's play. They had taken a couple of airfields in no time at all – the Poles had not built any defences towards the West worth mentioning, only towards the East. The people in the occupied zones were not much better than the gipsies they used to see on country roads at home. His family farm was a palace compared to the hovels where he was billeted. His younger brother, Karl, had been suddenly sent to the north. Hitler now held Europe firmly by two ends. A fellow hadn't even known before how many nations there were crawling about up there. Wilhelm was worried lest those countries might quickly make peace, for they must realize they hadn't a chance. He didn't feel like so many of his neighbours who were glad they could be at home for the harvest. The greatest harvest of all was ripe and ready for the picking. Over there in the East, his son wrote, there was a fat wheat crop. Wilhelm enjoyed all those descriptions of the earth in the letters from the front. The only reason he went out to work with his wife and their grown daughter was because the work helped to quiet his restlessness and because he still hoped he might suddenly be called up.

In the winter, when there was less work in the fields and it grew dark earlier, Liese did not mind if her husband did not sit around at home too much. She had enough to keep her busy with the meetings of the German Girls Bund and the *Frauenschaft*, to which she walked with her big daughter because anything was better than sitting at home. The daughter was now a buxom lass, with a thick nose like her father's and bulging eyes. She had as many freckles as her mother, only on her they were plastered in spots instead of being scattered about.

Liese could not understand that her husband was ashamed because he was still at home; he, Wilhelm Nadler, forgotten and unwanted. He suffered too from the realization that his own star was no longer in the ascendant. It was unfair of Nature, he thought, not to renew his youth with this new war; he was ashamed to hang about at the tavern with all the tired and useless old farmers.

From his workshop Christian watched the three of them sweating away out in the fields. The sole object on the field for which he felt any longing was not there any more. He had not even had a chance to see him before he went off to war, for the boy had been shipped off suddenly. Christian did not even know whether the boy, the cuckoo's egg he had laid in the farm nest during the last war, were

demoralized or prospering, whether he was a good boy or a bad one. He only knew that he was there. Now this mixture of dreams and calculations was in danger.

The road-workers had long since been recruited. 'Our dock,' Christian said to his dog, 'has turned into a regular port.' For ever since they had dug a new shaft further inland, there was a great coming and going whenever a shift changed and part of the gang crossed the lake in the boat. New faces for the most part. Morning and evening they plodded past, so tortured and sullen that they did not even so much as glance at Christian. One of them, however, named Firl, stopped now and then to have a nail put in his shoe. In that way Christian learned that he came from Oberschoeneweide, the place Stroebel whom Christian had known well also came from. As he hammered away Christian shot Firl a sidelong glance; the latter met his eye and nodded. Then, taking his shoe, he hurried and joined the others. Christian looked after the boat. From his brain a thin thread ran straight across the lake, straight across the world menaced with bombs and fear, behind the boat to little, square-shouldered Firl.

When the weather was too cold to work outside, this Firl would come into the shop time and again to have his shoes repaired. After this had been going on some time, he came out with his request. Christian had a radio. Would he mind if he turned it on for a moment? He fooled around with the knob for a while. Christian watched him. Though he had never had much to do with men, or perhaps just because he had not, he could read from tiny signs, from a man's features and from his fingers what he was thinking about. He thought now: 'This Firl is still not sure whether he can trust me or not.' Aloud he said:

'Go on and get into bed. You can wrap yourself and the radio up in my covers.'

He pulled the curtain over the window so that no one could spy on them from the lake. Experience had taught him wisdom.

For weeks Firl had been wanting to tune in on forbidden broadcasts. He did not dare try it at home in the crowded room. Since the signing of the Russian Agreement, he avoided conversation with his fellow workers more than ever. Now and then he talked with an old friend who lived hours away in Brandenburg, and sometimes made the long journey for a brief comforting talk and advice with his colleague. The man could stay only half an hour and during that time the two friends walked up and down asking and answering

questions. In the waiting-room or on the platform, Firl listened to the questions and answered them as quickly as possible. The war with Finland? The Mannerheim Line must be broken before the enemy attacked Russia. The name tells you, of course, what's going on there. Who is this Mannerheim anyway? He was the hangman in the fighting at home. What about the division of Poland? We should have helped the Russians as little as we helped the Poles. We should have rejoiced over their misfortune.

Perhaps the pact is good for the Russians and bad for us? No, no, never! Nothing that is good for the Russians can be bad for us. How can it be bad for us if the only socialistic country in the world gains more time to make itself invincible?

And as his friend stood on the coach steps Firl gave him this last advice: 'Remember: What is good for them is good for us. What is bad for them is bad for us.'

Though his friend went home somewhat relieved after such conversations, Firl himself suffered keenly in his loneliness. Now he flung the bed-covers off furiously. 'You can only get the "Waltz Dream" on your miserable little set. I'll bring my own some day; we'll see whether we can get anything better on it.'

Every time Firl came now, Christian made his dog lie down in front of the door. The dog barked furiously whenever anyone turned off the highroad into the field, with the result that they were often unnecessarily disturbed. But once, late in the afternoon - the last trip of the workers' boat had gone and Firl had decided to go home around the lake on foot - Widu kept up a steady barking. Someone was coming straight towards the shack. Christian immediately recognized the steady voice that quieted the dog. It was his sister-in-law, Liese. As impudently and as gaily as if they had never had a quarrel she called out:

'Here I am again, Christian dear. Wilhelm and I have decided we want to have the whole family together once more at noon for roast pig.'

Christian went on working on Firl's shoe. He had put a couple of screws and a radio wire in his tool chest because it was the safest place. He thought: 'Looks as though they need me for something.' Liese went on in a loud, cheerful tone: 'Now, especially when Wilhelm is going into the army too, we've decided that everything is to be forgotten. Wilhelm says he wants to go to the front with a light heart. He doesn't want to leave any enemies behind anywhere. So I came straight over to you.'

Christian said: 'Well, all right.'

'So, you see, come over tomorrow at eleven.'

In Wilhelm's kitchen, with its delectable odour of roast pig, the family – or rather what was left of the family – gathered around the table with several friends who had either not yet joined the army or who were home on leave. The youngest, Gustav, an overgrown lad, a Hitler Youth boy, stared at his father in silent envy. Of all the members of the family he was the one to whom Christian was the most indifferent. If Christian had not been so indifferent to the boy, he would have hated him. Christian tied up his dog in the yard. Wilhelm shook hands with him; he had now cast aside all home ties so completely that nothing connected with that home could anger him any more. Besides, after all, Christian and Liese were beyond the age when a man need worry about leaving them alone. Anyway he was above these family irritations. In Berlin he had run into a man he had known in the old days. The man had immediately arranged to get Wilhelm back into the army, though, at his age, he could not, of course, expect a position of command. But the man realized that a person like Wilhelm could not be measured by the ordinary scale. Wilhelm announced proudly:

'Now there are three men in our family under the flag.'

'Juergen there belongs to our family now too,' Liese said. 'He's promised to our Grete. Next leave they'll make a couple.'

Christian shook hands with Juergen. Grete's young man rubbed his hands at sight of the enormous roast pig. Christian recognized him as the S.A. boy who had tied up Strobel that night in his shack and helped his comrades drown him in the lake. He thought: 'Well, I hope he won't tie a couple of stones to my niece's thick legs one of these days.'

However, his table companion's thought did not spoil Juergen's taste for the succulent roast.

A few weeks later Wilhelm Nadler's regiment marched into France, into a section rich in grain. They occupied a little town called Pithiviers. The wish he had cherished, year in and year out, was at last fulfilled. He had lived to see the war. And it had been exactly as he had imagined war would be, which is something few people can say when their wishes materialize. They had roared into France like a pack of hounds in full cry. The foreigners had bowed before their might and magnificence. Wherever there had been any attempt at resistance, it was immediately crushed. Wherever Nadler had marched in with his men, in every city and every hamlet, hatred had turned to the consternation with which the conquered look up to a ruthless conqueror. That was what Nadler, in his

dreams, had always felt belonged to war, that mute entreaty in the eyes of the conquered:

'You have power over me, but be kind, spare me.'

That paltry bit of land his brother Christian had begrudged him at home was only a speck of sand compared to the grain of this conquered land. And when they tramped through the fields the corn seemed to cry out like men: 'You have power, but spare me.' The same undertone ran through the rustling fields and the timid questions of women and children: 'You have power, of course, but spare me.' When German planes and tanks crushed a latent revolt, Wilhelm Nadler tasted the delights of power. Not just a tame, make-believe power over a couple of obstreperous boys, but the real thing, the only thing that deserved the name of power – power over life and death. And when later he entered the ruined village, a mass of rubble and bits of human beings and broken walls, a village that had no breath of rebellion left, and he helped a woman glue together a few pieces of furniture or gave a child a piece of sugar, then Wilhelm felt in every fibre of his being the true meaning of power: the conqueror's generosity and the gratitude of the wretched conquered.

Only once did he feel slightly uncomfortable. They were encamped in a village square. The regimental staff had set up a couple of tables in the sunshine and spread out maps on them. A major rode up and dismounted. Nadler had plenty of leisure to observe what went on. He had seen that major somewhere! Where could it have been? Suddenly he recognized the idol of his youth, Hauptmann Degenhardt, to whom he had given his full devotion at a time when everything in Germany had been in chaos. Going up to the lieutenant, he asked him to take his message to the major who had just arrived. He watched excitedly as the message was relayed. A swarm of memories rose up in him: the brigade in action, the attack on the Royal Stables in Berlin, the counting out of the prisoners, and the one they had driven that time straight through the Grünewald. They had taken an officer's car that had had a flat tyre. They had exchanged cars; he, Nadler, had turned over his prisoner to the new occupants. Afterwards there had been a whole year of waiting and hoping and Degenhardt had trained them and put them on their mettle for anything the future might have in store. Then had come the worst day of his life, when the brigade was disbanded, and he had been obliged to go back home. Now, however, everything was as it had been before, even the beloved old face had turned up again. He saw the major glance hastily across the square, where, as they were explaining to him, someone was waiting to speak to him. But

whether he had not recognized Wilhelm Nadler again, or whether he had no time to see him, the major waved them away and the next moment took his seat in the officer's car.

Wilhelm swallowed his disappointment.

His regiment was transferred from Pithiviers to a neighbouring village. The highroad was crowded with fugitives, returning, slowly and wearily, to what was left of their homes. They pushed handcarts and carried on their backs the things that, exhausted as they were, nothing on earth could have persuaded them to leave behind: some had brought bedclothes, others strange objects, a birdcage or a picture, some a child wrapped in many clothes. One man pushed a tiny coffin in the baby carriage. He would be able to bury his child at home after all. Two officers were riding beside Nadler. One of them said to the other: 'Strange no one has fired a single shot at us.' 'They were ordered to cease firing: they obeyed orders, that's all.'

They marched into the village. Cows, their milking time long overdue, lowed piteously. The field post office with the German official seal on it was set up on the church square. Wilhelm thought: 'I'll just quickly send Liese a card.' He was quartered in a farmhouse which he compared with his own. Here the narrow courtyard was on the side, not behind the house as at home. A couple of people were staring dully out of the window. They did not look like farmers: probably they were refugees who had found shelter here.

As soon as Wilhelm Nadler had taken off his equipment he went out into the courtyard to the pump. The half-naked soldiers stepped aside to make room for him. One, laughing, offered him his soap, another his brushes.

The people at the window watched the bathing with that apathetic attention with which one watches unimportant actions that distract one from thoughts too tragic to dwell on. There were four or five old men and women, a daughter the same age as Grete Nadler, two little children, and a young man who held his arm as if it were paralysed. He was a soldier, a fugitive from the battlefield. He had torn up his military papers and exchanged his uniform in the farmer's house for civilian clothes to escape the prison camp the Germans had set up in Pithiviers. He looked with particular care at the soldiers' thorough scrubbing because he, even more than the other onlookers, was tortured by thoughts he could not bear to dwell on.

Wilhelm Nadler stripped; he was proud of his healthy body that looked as young as that of the youngest soldier. The refugees in the window watched curiously as he rubbed himself with the borrowed brushes. The escaped soldier watched with particular curiosity

because the thought he could keep from thinking only when he watched very closely was particularly depressing. It was the same thought the two officers who had ridden beside Wilhelm Nadler had expressed an hour before: 'Not a single shot. Why? Orders were given to cease action. Why?'

'Who gave those orders? Who obeyed them? We have been betrayed. What does that mean, betrayed?'

Treason – the worst of all crimes! For the traitor adds the basest and meanest to the weakest there is in human beings. Why did we think we were betrayed? Why did we obey? Because we would rather live than die; because we wanted a reason for living we obeyed the traitor, believed all his treacherous lies.

Now it had almost happened! Instead of keeping his eyes fixed on the pump, he had followed his thoughts, and they were dangerous and menacing, if he let them run on only a little farther.

With an effort he forced himself to keep his eyes on the naked soldiers. Wilhelm Nadler was busily soaping himself from head to foot, till he fairly shone. He raised an arm to soap himself under his armpits; the soldiers laughed.

'Take a look at the window. Their eyes are popping out.'

Nadler said: 'D'you wonder! They've never seen a man scrub himself clean in their whole lives.'

He made an obscene gesture intended for the women in the window. The soldiers roared with laughter. Nadler felt young and happy. The runaway soldier in civilian clothes in the window frowned as he watched Nadler stretch out his right arm to soap himself under the right armpit. He particularly loathed the way that naked German soldier systematically scrubbed every inch of his disgustingly healthy body. He was the enemy, stripped bare. Naked, unvarnished treason; blackguardism soaped and scrubbed clean.

'One of you fellows just stick your thumb in the spout,' said Wilhelm Nadler. He threw down the soap and began flexing his knees. Slowly he turned in a circle, highly satisfied with his clean, strong body. A soldier held his thumb over the pump spout so that the water came, not as before in one single stream, but spread like a sprinkler. The fugitive in the window watched tensely as Nadler turned himself round and round. He thought: 'I can't watch him any longer; I'll think of something far away, if I have to think of anything.' He thought quickly of his mother; the little garden in Pamiers, the bead curtain that hung between the outside door and the hallway instead of draperies. He tried to remember the pattern so that he would not see what the naked soldier was laughing about

now. He thought of his first sweetheart, the way she looked as she stuck her head through the bead curtains. No matter how shrilly the naked soldier laughed, he did not once look in his direction.

The school in Pamiers, a grubby little house in a grubby little street; and the little teacher, as grubby as the house and the street, his essays on Corneille and his fear that he would not be promoted; chiefly fear that he had to do the fifteen essays again, to repeat the same paper on 'The Cid'. Over there at the well the soldiers had stopped laughing. He thought: 'Now he's washed himself now he'll dry himself. I won't look at them; I'll think of my mother and of the school in Pamiers, of my schoolmate, Alphonse. The teacher was always pleased with his voice, his recitation was always better than mine. He could declaim the whole of "The Cid".'

'What else could your son have done, one against three?'

'He could have died.' *

'I don't dare look at them or else – what else?'

He had put his army revolver in his trousers pocket. If he let himself think of that he would be done for. Well he might be done for, but not his country – not yet.

Wilhelm Nadler had straightened up. He thrust out his chest, very much pleased with himself, and twisting the towel between his hands, began rubbing it up and down his back.

At that moment the very thing the Frenchman had been trying to prevent happened: instead of following the soldier's bath attentively, he had followed his thought.

There was a loud report from the window. Wilhelm Nadler lay dead and neatly washed beside the pump out of which the water continued to run in a single stream. The soldier who had worked the pump handle and the soldier who had pressed his thumb in the spout stormed the farmhouse with their comrades.

II

Elisabeth Lieven sat on the steps under the Alexandrine pillars, in front of the main entrance to her manor house. The gateway was barred from top to bottom with cross-beams. She smoked one cigarette after the other, and ignored the groups of men and women on the highroad who stood there watching her or now and then shouting remarks that were probably aimed at her. It even looked as though the words might soon be followed by stones. She ground her heel thoughtfully into the sand in front of the porch. The two

* 'Que voulez-vous qu'il fasse contre trois?' 'Qu'il meurt.'

cars from the village were filled with the young people Lieven had brought with him an hour before. Elisabeth had insisted upon being brought out here once more and Lieven had yielded to her wishes, though he did not know what she could get out of saying farewell to a barred gate. His young S.S. friends from the embassy had promised to take care of his wife while he went into the village. The general attitude here in the country was doubtful and tense since the German families, on orders from their embassy following the pact with the Soviet Union, had begun leaving the land. The Lievens belonged to the few Germans who had been given the task of remaining to the last to carry out certain measures.

After his marriage, Ernst Lieven had bought out the lease and contracts through the mediation of his landlord, who had gladly offered his services. But it was now impossible to find a new tenant or lessee. Everyone expected the Soviets to occupy the country. 'What do letters and contracts mean to the Soviets?' everyone asked. 'They will just burn them up.' Who knew whether they would not burn the houses mentioned in the contracts as well? Lieven's landlord trembled before the future, as if putative flames were already licking his living body. Ernst Lieven had succeeded in getting him his papers so that he could go to Germany, along with his wife, his daughters and the families of his sons-in-law.

Retzlow got out of the last car; he looked neither to the right or to left as he walked past the staring crowd. For a second the muttering ceased, only to break out behind his back the more excitedly. He stopped in front of Elisabeth and looked down at her.

'Ernst asked me to drive you into town in case he does not come back immediately,' he said.

Elisabeth merely went on grinding her other heel into the sand.

'Nonsense, my dear Retzlow, I have time. I'll wait with all of you.'

He looked down at her beautiful hair, as perfectly arranged as in all the months at her home or at embassy parties. Her stockings were drawn smooth and tight over her long legs. He thought, as he was always thinking: 'Why doesn't she ever take any particular notice of me? She knows perfectly well how many love affairs her husband has. She herself has had lovers enough in her life, they say.' Aloud he said:

'I promised your husband to take care of you. You can see for yourself what that bunch there has in mind.'

'I haven't paid much attention. Well, what do they have in mind?'

'To get rid of their masters as quickly as possible.'

'Move a step to one side, please. Thanks, Retzlow.' She looked at the crowd of people. 'Oh, yes! They can hardly wait for me to get out. Perhaps I could handle them. Let the others go on ahead in the meantime. But leave me here.'

'To wash clothes, perhaps with all the other women, in the lake? If that's what you want . . .'

'It might not be so bad in this lake. There is no lake like ours. . . . I really did not treat you at all badly. The door is already barred. I can't go back in my house any more. I'm going away at once. Have just a little more patience, you people. This is my last day; then you'll be rid of me.'

She looked up at Retzlow and laughed: 'You're thinking a lot of furious thoughts at this very minute. Damned female and so on.'

'I'm only thinking that I promised Ernst to keep an eye on you.'

'There he comes!' she cried. She jumped up and ran to meet the car. The people stared after her. She took a few more puffs, then flung the cigarette far from her. Before anyone could stop her, she slipped behind the wheel without so much as a backward glance at the house.

'I'll drive ahead,' she called to the car in front. Lieven got in and sat down beside her.

'Why are you still here?' he said. 'One never knows what sort of crazy tricks you're up to.'

'It was hard for me to leave.' She drove alarmingly fast but so steadily that Lieven was not in the least perturbed. He would have liked to take her hand in a sudden rush of tenderness for which his wife seldom gave him any provocation, but he did not dare to touch her. He realized perfectly that she was venting her grief at being forced to leave in this rough, fast driving.

'My dear, this is not good-bye for ever. You must just imagine that the estate is let for a while.'

She made no reply. He went on:

'I would not have brought you up here again if I had dreamed it would mean so much to you. Don't worry, we'll come back again in the end, I promise you.'

'When?'

'Before long. Till then you will have to stick it out in Berlin or wherever you prefer to live. One can't compute time according to feelings, or according to one's homesickness or boredom.'

She said in a different tone: 'I've been wanting to tell you something important for a long time; but we never had time.' She took a

curve so sharply that Retzlow, sitting behind her, whistled. 'I'm going to have a child.'

Lieven said, 'What?'

'I'm going to have a child. I'm pregnant; I'm expecting a happy event. That's what they say, don't they, in plain language? They say you Nazis have an uncommon expression for this uncommon condition.'

'You're crazy.'

'Why should I be, my darling? I call that a strange welcome for the little mortal. Oh no, excuse me, for the fellow comrade. But why am I crazy all of a sudden?'

He did not answer till he had sufficient control of himself to speak calmly.

'You never wanted one. We had an understanding on that score in advance. And now, right now, when everything is upside down . . . We're in the midst of a war; we don't know where we stand. I may have to go far away – perhaps next week. I suppose I'm the father of the child you're going to have.'

'I believe so, my dear Ernst. I must confess that from the very first I was not up to any good. I wasn't wildly in love.'

'But you're not a peasant; you didn't have to have a child on that account, particularly at this moment.'

'You have just finished promising me we shall come back some day.' She took another hairpin bend, and Retzlow, in the back seat, cursed. She went on:

'A child, Ernst, needs the land. I would not want one if I did not have faith in your promise. A child binds one together with the earth; a child brings responsibilities.'

'What the devil, my dear! You're not usually so gullible. Of course, you can have faith in my promise, only that my promise isn't quite as certain as snow in winter; you can promise the children that because you know it will be cold. The temperature necessary for occupying just that particular piece of land you love so dearly doesn't depend on the time of the year.'

They came within an ace of crashing into a huge truck. The driver cursed them in Russian. The truck was carrying a load of machine parts to one of the airfields the Soviets had seized. Ernst Lieven suppressed the juicy Russian curse he had ready on his tongue.

'You say a child clings to the land; I think it clings most of all to its own people. A child may be born of Langobards in northern Italy, or in Spain or in Africa, or of Goths on the Volga; his people are always his people. Love of the land comes afterwards.'

They were nearing the city and Elisabeth slowed down her speed to sixty. She laughed.

'You have a certain aptitude for poetry,' she said. 'I've always noticed that. You are almost an artist. That's why I like living with you so much. The Langobards, the Goths – my little son, I mean our son, for it will surely be a son; we need one, the estate needs one. Just hear how bright your father is. For your mother, my poor little son, doesn't know half so much. She didn't even go to the bride's school, the school for future wives of future S.S. fathers.'

'Elisabeth, cut out that nonsense. The affair is too serious for that.'

'Really! First you call me crazy. Now the affair is too serious for you. Do you know, my dear, this is the first time I have ever known you to be afraid of anything.'

'What?'

'Of course, you are afraid. I have always had a great admiration for your courage. We Germans have a weakness for masculine courage, after all. There's no denying that guns and decorations, the symbols of courage, have a strong attraction for us.'

'Stop chattering!'

'You are not afraid, how does one say, before a world of enemies; you are not afraid of death. You are brave. But you are afraid of a tiny unknown atom of life inside me. Why?'

The city was, in certain parts, deadly quiet, as if confused and stifled; in others, unusually agitated; yet even the agitation seemed confused and stifled. People did not know exactly what was going to happen. Rumours ran riot. Here they swept an alleyway empty, there they drove crowds of people together on a square. Many houses with closed shop-windows looked as if they were sealed up during an epidemic; others were exaggeratedly full of life and gaiety. The church towers with their glittering tops gazed indifferently over all as if there were nothing but clouds above and below. Wherever people passed the flags with the hammer and sickle flapping against the front of the Russian Embassy, they raised their heads unconsciously and turned to look back. They stared at the swastika in front of the German Embassy, and the corners of their mouths, their glances, betrayed the thoughts they had harboured for years.

Ernst Lieven let his wife out in front of the town house which, since the departure of the owner, was closed up even to its strange windows. He saw her an hour later in a wing of the embassy. She was helping the personnel do up bundles and her directions met with

far more success than those of the other women, because they were quiet and to the point. Retzlow said, more to himself than to Lieven:

'A wonderful woman!'

Lieven looked at his wife a moment. She was as slender and graceful as ever. So far he had never regretted his marriage. Elisabeth had been on good terms with everybody in the country and in the city. She had managed her household tasks without any annoyance to him. She herself had never had a whim that could have upset him in any way; she had allowed him to have his own fancies both in love and friendship. Now, however, she had come out with this foolish whim: a child. That was what he needed least of all in life. He had his own interpretation of freedom: he hated any sort of tie. A man put up with certain Party orders, certain restrictions, just because, once properly carried out, they permitted him to live as freely as possible, to eat what he pleased, to love and to kill as much as he pleased. But first one had to make many sacrifices to attain that end. After all, Elisabeth had understood that perfectly. That time when she had stood pale with joy, in front of her house after an absence of twenty years, he had told her:

'Now you see how far we've come. Now you see, it was worth while.'

Except that seeing the estate had suddenly aroused this whim in her. Of course, sooner or later he would be the master here. Then they would live again on their own land, for generations. He had no great need for generations, it was true. He liked the Third Reich's daring enterprises because they made his own life varied and turbulent. But he had little time for future plans that materialized only after death.

Elisabeth's body, long-legged and narrow-hipped, did not show the slightest curve. Retzlow devoured her with his eyes. She would have done better to start something with this Retzlow, thought Lieven, than to have put this over on me.

That evening at the frontier they left their motor and changed into the sleeping-car.

'Stop smoking,' Lieven told her; 'your finger is yellow. I'll give you something to comfort you - though it is dangerous to promise you anything. We shall come back again. We will throw the lodger out of our house. We will put our house in order.'

III

Marie sat with her sewing in her favourite spot - the little balcony that clung to the front of the house like a bird's nest.

Straight below her in an identical bird's nest sat Frau Triebel with her home work for the factory. The quarrel that had once separated the two families still made a slight barrier between the women, a barrier they liked to break down frequently by running to each other with questions and advice, borrowing kitchen utensils or making gifts of food. Frau Triebel had not seen her husband since her visit to Oranienburg. He had long ago been moved to another camp. All she knew was that he was still alive. He was still the same rough, quarrelsome fellow worming his way mysteriously between kicks, blows and, nowadays, probably shots.

Marie was silently devoted to the equally silent Frau Triebel. Day after day Frau Triebel went up and down the stairs, always as serenely calm as if no trouble had ever touched her. Marie took her into her heart once and for all after an incident that had alienated the rest of the tenants in the house. To help the strange girl whose only connection with her was that she had been Triebel's sweetheart, Frau Triebel had run tirelessly from one Gestapo cellar to another. The girl's own family would have nothing to do with her. The *Staatspolizei* questioned Frau Triebel again and again in the hope that she would say something against the girl. Paying no attention to surprised glances and questions, Frau Triebel went through the whole house collecting money for the girl, as if she had been her daughter. The result was that all efforts on the part of government came to nothing. And the woman sitting on her balcony, sewing, had no other witness to her courage than Marie who sat and sewed directly above her.

The cry of a newspaper vendor shrilled from street to street. Marie was so accustomed to the noise of the city that she never noticed it. Her husband was at work and fairly well paid; the eldest son was somewhere in the north, the youngest on the West front. Helene still worked at her old place. Since the war, invisible mending of good clothes had become both useful and necessary in the western part of the city. Many people in the house said Hitler had got what he wanted. Their tone expressed admiration for the man who, when all was said and done, always attained his goal. Even Geschke said occasionally: 'The fellow certainly gets what he wants.' But his tone expressed bitterness. When she was alone Marie recalled every one of her boy's actions, all his words. 'What Hitler wants and what we want is as different a thing as fire and water. When Hitler praises something, it's a bad sign. When he warns us against something, then it must be very good for us.' Now, as she sewed, Marie thought over these things. She had more leisure than in the past.

The world now looked as Hitler wanted it to look. It wouldn't be long before they'd have peace now. If a few more people would just realize that, from now on, the world was going to look the way Hitler wanted, then there would be nothing to stop them from having peace. For minutes at a time, on the balcony, Marie could forget the war, though this was already the second year. The geraniums in the balcony boxes had buds and single blooms. The sun shone as warm and mild as every May and children played in the courtyard and in front of the house. Except for the cries of a newspaper boy here and there, or the blaring of the radio in the Lorenz tavern, there was nothing this morning to remind one of the fighting at the front. Nothing but this heavy weight on one's heart, the pressure of anxiety because it was four weeks now since she had had a letter from Hans. She was relieved, however, when the postman turned the corner empty-handed. He might have brought the long-desired letter from the front; he might also – as he had already done twice in this house – brought the word: Fallen. Frau Weigand, in mourning, just coming home with her market basket, was proof to Marie that, in spite of the sunshine, peace was not yet here. Death was still present; his broad, powerful wings hovering over the house, the whole land, even the grey-blue sky. But Death hovered so silently that his wings made no sound.

As she sat and sewed Marie thought about all these things. 'The English aren't beaten yet,' Geschke said. Then all of a sudden there was peace and friendship with Stalin. 'I always knew that they'd both get together,' said Geschke. Why had Hans said: 'What we want and what he wants are as different as fire and water'?

How happy Marie had been that time when her stepdaughter had unexpectedly brought the money for the training school. She had been so proud of her boy. Every time he came home with a prize, she had thought: 'He will amount to something; he has a way out.' But that way had long since been barred. He was not a locksmith, he was a soldier. After his land service he had promptly got a job; then the door closed again; the boy was locked in. Only if they were now to make the peace Hitler offered, she wouldn't have to worry about Hans any more. What could be bad about peace, even if Hitler wanted it? How could it be bad for her to sit on her balcony in the sunshine sewing on work that was not badly paid?

But it was bad. The most important thing was missing. And you could tell it was bad because she did not even know exactly what the lack was. She had food, she had money, and this morning she was quite calm. Not exactly happy – that would be asking too much.

One can't be happy in the way one is happy as a young girl having her first love affair. Why not? Life should be one delirious waiting till you heard happiness hurrying towards you on swift, impatient feet.

That was not happiness knocking on the door: it was Tante Emilie. She was wearing a flowered summer dress though she had passed the age for flowered dresses. At the opening of the neck she wore the brooch that had been turned in last Sunday by the Frauenschaft. All Tante Emilie's motions showed her pride in her young, slender figure. Even her greeting was as enthusiastic as if she were bubbling over with youth. Marie handed her the work she was doing for the shop, which had recently been taken over by the army. Just as Tante Emilie used to babble about her own love affairs in the old days, so now she gossiped about the love affairs of all the girls in the shop. One might think it was her special mission from heaven to report the details to Marie. She was probably hoping to herself that Marie would ask her to have a cup of coffee. She described the troubles of a girl named Otilie. 'But I told her that in my opinion it was every woman's duty to give birth to her child now. In our day things were different. A mother wasn't so much respected as she is today.'

When Emilie had gone at last Marie picked up a new piece of work from a new bundle. She sat down again on the balcony. And though she racked her brain to find the thoughts Emilie's arrival had disturbed, she could not find them again. She thought: 'I don't want any buttons, I don't want any buttonholes. I don't want anything now. I'm going to put this work away this very minute. I'll just sit and watch the street.' She looked down at the Belle Alliance Platz. Lines of people streamed out of the subway, as if they had been washed out on a tide. Marie heard a military band in the distance. The lines of people spilling out of the subway gathered in a knot on the square, then rushed away down other streets. Marie stared down her street: she was pale and motionless. Suddenly something happened, something she had not thought of for years. There he was, her lover, for whom she had once waited all night long in despair, then for long periods at a time, and then, finally, had ceased to expect - there he was now, coming at last from the Belle Alliance Platz straight to her house.

He looked tired and dirty, but happy and expectant. He was thin and sunburned and he was whistling. His whistling alone would have been enough to upset her. She jumped up to open the door for him. She heard him leaping up the stairs three at a time. Then he

was standing before her. She flung her arms around his neck. She laid her head on his breast.

'Here I am, Mother,' said the boy. 'I'm just passing through. I could not write before.'

'It's lucky I happened to be at home,' said Marie. She felt a little dizzy. Hans sat down in his old place on the kitchen sofa. He tossed his cap aside. Marie pressed his head against her breast; at first she merely touched his hair which was rough and dirty. She shut her eyes, because the smell of the hair gave her the deepest sense of his presence. She said: 'I'll cut some meat for you right away.'

'Go to it.'

It seemed to her another proof of his presence that he ate something. That was security that he was not shot to pieces. He was not so very hungry, to be sure; the smell alone seemed to satisfy him. He said: 'Come and sit on my knee.' He pulled her down on his lap, he laughed, he asked about this and that. Their neighbour, Frau Melzer, came in. She clasped her hands in surprise and seized this opportunity to give a quick glance around Marie's kitchen.

'You boys certainly did a wonderful job,' she told Hans.

'What do you mean?'

'In France. They thought they could keep on playing *skat* behind their old Maginot Line. And when do you think we'll be in England?'

Hans looked at the woman with an amused twinkle in his eye: so she was still the same. Just as a face one has forgotten in your waking hours suddenly appears to one in a dream! 'I had no idea, Frau Melzer,' he said, 'that you were so fond of England.'

'Me? Why?'

'Because you ask when we shall be there. Do you want to go too?'

'I've no particular desire to go there. I wouldn't mind if "Strength Through Joy" arranged it sometime.'

'Of course,' said Hans rocking his mother gently on his knees. 'You always had a yearning for the wide world. You were in Norway once too, weren't you?'

'Yes, Hans, the very place your brother wrote from. I can describe it all exactly to your mother. I was there on holiday with my husband; the whole tannery was sent. You've no idea what they used to do for us in the old days! Why, you knew in advance all the names in war bulletins. For instance, the place with all those columns and so many gods - Athens, where the Greeks live. My husband remembers everything. Not me. That makes the old man mad. Just as it always did, you remember? I could never remember the separate stars! They had such funny names. And now he's just the same about

foreign countries as he was about the stars before. The island we just landed on with parachutes – no matter how far away a place is he describes it to you as if he'd been born there. That's the way he used to talk about the stars.'

'Well, tell it all to my mother sometime when I am not here, Frau Melzer. I haven't much time left now. I hope you understand, Frau Melzer. But I'll be sure to drop in tomorrow morning before I go off to see you.'

'I do hope so,' said Frau Melzer.

Marie bowed her head. This was the first she had heard that her son had to leave her in the morning. In her joy she had not thought of time.

'Oh, stay! Don't go!' she said foolishly.

The boy laughed: 'I'll be sure to come back. You can count on that. The war hasn't even begun for us. I've always had luck. You helped me, Mother, because you've never been afraid. I think if you hadn't waited for me that time they would have caught me. You must keep on believing now that I'm coming back.'

'I can't believe the way I used to any more,' thought Marie, 'not so strongly anyway.'

'There's your father!' she exclaimed.

Geschke came in looking as sullen as ever. When he saw Hans his face brightened.

'My boy!' he said. He held him off, then clasped him close. Marie thought: he was probably right not to let the boy know he is not his real father. It is better for the boy now. This is a real home-coming.

But scarcely were the two men seated cheerfully at table, when trouble began as before.

'Well, are you still pleased about the pact with Russia? The Nazis seem to be getting along quite well with their new friends.'

'Stalin knows what he's doing.'

'Oh, nonsense! That's what your brother Franz says when his Hitler does something queer. And no wonder either: birds of a feather!'

'So far Hitler has never done anything that turned out well for us – Stalin never anything that turned out bad. That's why we trust him, even when we don't always understand at once what he means. And we distrust Hitler even when he occasionally tries to soft-soap us.'

'I don't know,' said Geschke. 'I don't like it. It seems unnatural to me, almost like a crime against one's race.'

'Why do you say it's almost as unnatural as race pollution, Father, when you just said they were two of a kind? That means you didn't think they were alike after all.'

Geschke stared straight ahead. All the year long he had suffered because he had been right. Secretly he had wanted his son to be in the right. He pulled himself together.

'What sort of people are the French anyway?' he asked.

Hans answered shortly: 'Just like any other people.' Then to end the conversation, he said: 'I'll just run over and see Helene now.' But his father and mother went with him, for they did not want to lose a moment of his time.

They seldom went to the Bergers. Helene more often brought her child home to see them. The temperaments of the two families frequently clashed. In the old days the two men had often quarrelled sharply. As neither of them trusted the other fully enough to quarrel openly, their hostile silence led to an estrangement. Now, seeing each other again, both men thought: 'He hasn't changed a bit. He hasn't given in to Hitler.'

Frau Berger had grown thinner and her neck longer with the years; she had a sharp tongue. The granddaughter, already big enough to go to school, came rushing to welcome the guests. The grown-ups crowded around Hans. There were hugs and kisses, exclamations of delight and joy! Soon the delicious smell of coffee pervaded the house. Hans sat between his mother and sister. They could not keep their hands off him. A young girl, who had obviously been a guest in this house before, sat down a short distance away from the table. She was small, with dark, almost sombre eyes.

'This is my friend, Emmi,' said Helene.

Hans looked at her more closely. 'You can't be Emmi!'

Her eyes did not change, though she smiled with her lips.

'I knew you at once, Hans.'

Marie said: 'Come and sit nearer.'

She knew the girl from all the things her son had told her and she had never forgotten the old story.

Emmi was still tiny, still dark-eyed. She used to sit with Hans around the campfire. And she got into scrapes with him. That time, too, when at every step on the stair Marie had trembled with fear for her boy! How many and what different fears she had had to endure for his sake. First of all: he might not have been born. He might have faded away to a skeleton during the inflation days. And later; boys had thrown stones, close past his eyes. Then there had been the scarlet fever that had carried off the eldest boy and left

Hans as thin as a piece of paper. Then rascals had talked him into stealing, and the girl too; she had been so little, Hans had told his mother, that they had chosen her to crawl through a pipe – but she had not been quick enough. Hans had been able to get away. The night that followed had been a sleepless one for both mother and son. For the first time they had known what it was to be afraid of the police – innocuous fears and an innocuous police compared to what came afterwards! Stupid and tiny as she was, the girl had not betrayed him. Even then the flame had burnt brightly in her, the flame that is not a glittering fire, but a quiet light warming and shining on everyone and everything, that the earth may not be dark and cold. So silent, so modest was the light that no one saw it shining out of the thin little girl sitting at the table decked with coffee and rolls. The man and the girl were only worried about how they were going to manage to sit together. At last Helene got up to put her child to bed. Old Berger brought out the cards Oskar had written from Africa. How slowly and sluggishly Oskar's father moves, thought Hans. Even his thoughts move slowly. Now Oskar with his long neck was trudging through the desert sand. Berger said: 'It looks sometimes as if I'd never live to see how they get rid of Hitler. He seems to be as smart about *Blitz* as about his other magic tricks.'

On the way home Emmi said: 'He has grown old.'

'Old?' said Hans in surprise.

Because it was late and the last tram had left the Geschkes invited Emmi to spend the night. She had to be at her factory early in the morning.

'Yes, old. He works harder than ever. He says: "This is what we've come to"; and he also says: "I'd just like to talk to my dead son now. If he were here, he would have died ten times when such and such a thing happened."'

The Geschkes went to bed the moment they got home. Marie left the door open a crack to hear what the two young people were saying to each other. Emmi was telling Hans:

'I was put into the reformatory school that time. When Hitler came to power the teachers said: "The old system is to blame for everything." They said: "You poor children couldn't do anything about it. We are Germans: the Jews would have starved us." We liked that. I believed it too. Then a girl came to the school. She was clean and fair-haired. Only her mouth had been badly beaten and she had no teeth left. She told us one night she had refused to sing the Horst-Wessel song at school. Her parents had been deprived of

the right to bring her up. She and I became friends. We went together to the labour service. There wasn't much difference between that and the reformatory. They kept a specially sharp watch on us two. Meantime my parents had died. I went to live with my sister. You remember my sister? Do you remember how we sat round the campfire together? Now she has children. Her husband was a decent fellow. And he told me again all the things I had forgotten. Do you remember our old teacher at the Fichte camp? The history of class struggle?'

That's a funny sort of conversation, thought Marie. The boy and girl were now holding hands. Their knees touched as lovers' knees do.

'When the war broke out, my brother-in-law called out from our flat into the courtyard where the women were gossiping: "Now you've got your reward for having children. For every soldier an extra diaper." He couldn't stand it any longer. Usually he was cleverer than that. Believe me, he used to be much sharper. The next day they locked him up. There was a spy among the women, I believe; the air-raid warden princess or the anti-aircraft defence princess. She informed against my sister once before because she had not properly cleared out her attic.'

'Just as they did with us,' said Geschke. Marie had not realized that he was listening.

'Wouldn't you think the other women in the house would have spat at the spy? No, indeed. They were afraid. They were very polite so that their own husbands wouldn't be reported. Were human beings always so cowardly? Were they always so mean? I suppose they were, only we just didn't notice it. I went back to Berlin and into munitions. I'm living with some of the people who work with me. My own sister sent me to your sister, Helene. Now tell me about yourself.'

Marie heard Hans say things he had never said to her.

'I'm worried about the East. In France, so far, the Nazis have behaved fairly well. To prove how wonderful their order is in all this devilish chaos. In Poland they are beasts. According to what one hears from there, they are out-and-out devils and we are the devil's disciples. What can we do when they order us to do one filthy thing after the other? It is a tragedy for a country to be occupied by Hitler. When we were billeted in France I used to listen to the foreign broadcasts. I learned how a nation feels under Russian rule, how many schools they have opened in Bessarabia and Russian-Poland, and how, up to now, those people were not allowed to

learn how to read and write and now they have been taught to.'

No matter how hard Marie tried to catch more of the conversation, the single words she could get now and then had nothing whatever to do with the state of the world.

The next morning Emmi had gone by the time the others met in the kitchen. The coffee tasted bitter-sweet as at the last meal; words, morsels, everything, seemed to float gently past as if the last hours of their reunion passed more quickly than the first. Geschke was the first to leave. He had to go to work. 'Good luck!' he said.

Marie said: 'Come back!'

The boy laughed and said: 'Of course!' And he called back once more from the stairs: 'Look after Emmi!'

A few weeks later he ran out of the Polish village in which he was billeted and along the empty road. It was not yet dawn and the sky was still dark. Hans wanted to be the first to take the tremendous news to Zimmering, his new friend. Zimmering had already heard the news. Hans saw the man from afar, a powerfully built fellow with a body and a face like a horse. Hans had recognized Zimmering at once on the transport. At their first meeting years before in a Fichte camp, Zimmering had certainly been no horse, at the most a foal, though even then he had unmistakably horsey features. As Hans discovered on the journey to the Eastern front, Zimmering had not changed in any other respect. Even before they reached their destination they had become inseparable.

Breathing heavily, Hans stopped in front of him. Zimmering was carrying two full pails on a pole balanced across his powerful shoulders. He walked heavily and slowly, step by step, to avoid spilling a drop. And though his stride was slow, it was so long that Hans had to run to keep pace with him.

'Zimmering, Zimmering! We're at war with Russia now!'

Zimmering planted one leg before the other. In his big ugly face that frightened children, his lips curled back baring his gleaming white teeth. 'Then the Russians must beat the Germans,' he said.

Now a number of other soldiers came running out of the village, shouting and waving at them. To balance his pole Zimmering stood upright in their midst. Hans kept at his side in the crowd as if this horseman could protect him like a mother. He thought, in mingled triumph and bewilderment: 'Now, Father, you see who our enemy is.' The whole group returned to their quarters greatly excited. Hans still keeping close to his friend. Zimmering set down the pails. The sergeant, drunk with joy, began harassing the old peasant woman

he made a point of harassing every morning, as if that were the first duty of the day. She rushed breathlessly from one corner to the other as the commands whistled like the wind. The sergeant laughed and clapped his hands: 'Dance, old witch, dance!'

And all the other soldiers clapped and laughed and whistled as if this old woman were nothing but the pail handle, or the broomstick. She kept bumping into them and striking out around her, for she was almost blind. There was a gleam in her faded eyes. Perhaps she had understood the news: 'Now's the time, now it's come.' She rushed around faster than ever under all the cuffing and stamping that grew wilder and wilder. For the first time her face twitched as if she had caught the contagion of their uproarious laughter. Her toothless mouth puckered up; her breasts shook with silent laughter. 'You devils will soon be out-devilled.' Hans stared after her; even to him she looked like a witch at this moment. But he felt instinctively that there was a bit of his mother in this old witch and, when he thought of home, a bit of this old witch in his gentle, silent mother.

IV

Lieutenant Fahrenberg, Wenzlow's adjutant, was waiting for his commanding officer at the appointed place in front of the farmhouse originally assigned to him as his quarters. He was looking forward to seeing his commanding officer again even though they had been separated only a few hours. Not only did they work together in perfect harmony, but their association was an outlet for all the emotions and thoughts they would otherwise have kept to themselves. Fahrenberg's attitude contained a mixture of friendship and respect, Wenzlow's of friendship and almost fatherly responsibility. Though he was not aware of it, he felt that he looked for his own questions and doubts from this Fahrenberg, only more youthfully, more fearlessly and frankly expressed. They knew all about each other's home lives from family letters. Wenzlow knew that Fahrenberg was homesick for his fiancée and Fahrenberg knew that at home Wenzlow had an only son, and a favourite daughter who had turned rather sullen of late. He even knew about a Tante Amalie who had taken the place of Wenzlow's mother. All winter long the elder man and the younger man had been surrounded by the strange phantoms of this vague and evanescent friendship. These phantoms had gone with them on their advance into the Ukraine. The fiancée in Dortmund had received almost the same letters as Tante Amalie in her gaily coloured window in Potsdam. 'You would be surprised

if you knew how far our lines have advanced since the last letter.' 'Nothing can stop our advance.' When they were halted in the north, that was merely a matter of physical resources. 'The Russian winter was what stopped us in front of Moscow, never the enemy's superior force.'

Wenzlow did not learn till he got out of his car that it would be better for him to spend the night in a habitable farmhouse in the village. The quarters assigned to him would not be ready before morning. His talk with the officers in the staff car had left him in a good mood. He had finally got in touch with Brauns, for whom he had been looking for some time. It had struck him that Lieutenant-General Brauns did not place any too great importance on his report - almost as if he were ignoring him almost to the point of cutting him. That had given Wenzlow all the more to think about, for Brauns was exactly the type of man he had always wanted as a commanding officer. He had, therefore, been particularly upset when, for reasons not yet discernible, his career had apparently come to a halt with this man. Only the report, which he had already turned in, convinced him that Brauns was not overlooking him, but had observed him sharply. He had even expressed his satisfaction with him. Wenzlow admitted to himself that he had once again allowed himself to be misled by that sensitiveness that had played him so many tricks while he was still a cadet. He was one of those suspicious natures, quick to feel on trivial evidence, that a friend or a commanding officer is not paying him the proper respect. Now it turned out that Brauns not only respected, but valued him; an admiration which, like all his emotions, he hid behind a terse manner. Nor was he a hindrance to Wenzlow's career. On the contrary, he had given Wenzlow to understand that he was backing his promotion.

As a result of the change of quarters they did not enter the farmhouse, but drove at once into the village. This village had been completely destroyed; only a couple of houses were left standing. It was as quiet as a graveyard where the living are nowhere to be seen, and only the dead seem to move about freely over the graves. What was once the village street was filled with the contented uproar of soldiers enjoying a lull in the fighting. The few inhabitants still alive had crept into caves and hollows with their children as if the light of day were an insult to the dead. A little girl, who had obviously refused to obey or perhaps had no one to make her obey, stood in the village street staring at a dead cow lying in a pool of blood; perhaps it was the child's own cow. A couple of women, under orders from German

soldiers, carried wood and water. Their heads were bowed and their eyes narrowed as if they were ashamed to be seen among the enemy living.

Wenzlow had noticed the two gallows at the entrance to the village street because he had been obliged to drive past them. One of the men hanging there wore a beard, the other was a long-legged boy. Involuntarily Fahrenberg turned and looked at his commanding officer's face. He expected him to make some remark, but Wenzlow did not utter a sound. He merely gritted his teeth. Fahrenberg, he quickly realized, was not the person in this case to whom he could show his real feelings. He disapproved of criticizing senior officers in front of subalterns. On this advance into Russia he had met with a similar reception in two other villages. When he had shown his displeasure because such measures had been taken without his consent, he had been referred to Roennecke, as the man responsible. Roennecke had not been available. He had had an excuse for his absence from such high authority that it had been impossible for Wenzlow to interfere. Now Fahrenberg told him that the two men who had been hanged were grandfather and grandson. The Germans had found hand grenades in their barn. Roennecke had just returned and was waiting for Wenzlow at headquarters. Fahrenberg knew his commanding officer well enough to recognize his nervousness from the slight twitching of his jaw. To distract him he turned the conversation. Roennecke was no stranger to him either. He had been surprised to recognize in him the same Roennecke who had headed a National Socialist group of students back in 1929 at the Polytechnic School in Berlin. Under the Weimar Republic he had been expelled for leading a riot against Jewish professors: under Hitler he had promptly been reinstated and with special favours. Roennecke's technical career had then kept amazing step with his spectacular rise in the S.S.

With only a casual glance at the farmhouse, Wenzlow entered the room where steam was already rising out of the rubber tub his orderly always prepared for him on their arrival. He caught sight of a fieldpost letter that had just arrived and now lay under the little bronze figure he had carried in his baggage as a mascot ever since the days of his Far East command – Kwanon, the goddess of pity, a present from his long-lost Manja. He recognized his Tante Amalie's handwriting. He reached for the letter. Then he turned to Roennecke.

Roennecke had jumped to his feet the moment Wenzlow came in the door. Neither his features nor his bearing justified the emotions

which the S.S. insignia on his uniform aroused at sight. He carried himself stiffly, but more out of deference to his superiors than in arrogance. If his pale, very young face, highly-strung and sickly, with dark circles under the deepset, almost gentle eyes, reminded one of a death's head, it was the death's head of a mere boy. He showed no sign of illness now as he leapt to his feet and stood at attention. But as he sat down opposite Wenzlow, he swayed slightly and closed his eyes for a second. The next moment he opened them violently and apologized, moving his lips before speaking; boyish lips, parched and cracked from fever.

Lieutenant-General Brauns, he said wearily, has no doubt informed the Major that he approved the measures he, Roennecke, had promptly been forced to take.

Wenzlow quickly suppressed the feeling that Roennecke had gone over his head. He realized that he was prone to suspect others of trying to supersede him. He kept silent partly, in order not to betray his own ignorance of the situation, partly because Brauns had approved Roennecke's measures.

Roennecke went on to say that the facts had made everything clear to the Lieutenant-General. Particularly two dangerous situations which they had promptly covered: the enemy population in the recently occupied village had been told that it was not only useless but foolhardy to resist, also to conceal guilty persons. A guilty man, swinging high on the gallows for all to see, was far better proof that the conquerors were on the alert than a dead man buried under the earth who is quickly forgotten. 'That's what will happen to me! I'll be swinging up there if I try to do what I want to do', people under suspicion will say to themselves. However we Germans must realize that it is not quite ten years since we ourselves lived under the old rotten system. And someone might suddenly recall long-forgotten thoughts of the Soviet Union, our beloved land, etcetera. That's why we have to keep hammering away at the thought that we must come to this land as conquerors and with the power of conquerors.

As Brauns was satisfied with this reasoning, any objection Wenzlow would have liked to make would merely have shown that his disapproval of such measures covered only those carried out without his order. Instead of all the things Wenzlow would have liked to say, he said:

'Roennecke, you're sick. You have a fever. Take advantage of this rest period.'

With a smile that made his face look even younger and his words

sound even more mature, Roennecke explained that what was a rest period for the Major was the busiest time of all for him. After the Germans had occupied the farm it had been determined that the grenade had not been left there by accident. The important thing was to ascertain as quickly as possible from which depot the grenade had come. Orders were given to find out what shift had been at work in the factory, at which place in the hinterland and on which day. There were still traitors among the Germans trying to demoralize the troops, whereas, in the enemy's country, even children grabbed a gun. Roennecke moved his cracked lips, breathing heavily as if it were an effort for him to speak. He moistened his lips quickly in an effort to get out the last words. Of course there was hope that the United States' declaration of war had opened their eyes once and for all. It would have been impossible to find a better lesson than this internationale of Bolsheviks and Jewish bankers. The greatest capitalists in the world getting together with the Reds! The good thing about it for us is that our leaders realize the time for experiments and arguments is past. Now is the time for action.

Again apologizing for his illness, Roennecke left the room. Wenzlow was pleased rather than not with the visit. With his stringent orders, Roennecke was the symbol of a force from which Wenzlow certainly differed in his heart on many occasions; nevertheless there was nothing in their conversation that Roennecke could mention unfavourably in his report.

Wenzlow told his orderly to bring him a pitcher of hot water – the water in the rubber tub had cooled off. He had half undressed when he remembered the letter. He tore it open and began to read. He was immediately so absorbed that he noticed neither the delay in bringing his bath water nor the confused shouting in the courtyard. Suddenly the noise ceased. The orderly came back at last with the pitcher. He was relieved to see the Major still absorbed in his letter. He would not have to explain the delay.

In the partially damaged kitchen where a miserable group of men and women huddled together, the orderly had explained by signs what he wanted and a young boy had filled the pitcher with water and stood it in front of the door: the Major had forbidden anyone but his orderly to enter the room. As the orderly picked up the pitcher the handle broke off, leaving a puddle of water and broken bits of china on the threshold. The orderly was raging, but controlled his temper till he caught the sly expression on the young boy's face. This infuriated him. Grabbing the boy he began beating his head against the stove till finally the fellow's mouth lost that ugly sneer.

And while the old people hovered anxiously over the boy who lay there motionless and pale, a half-grown girl with clear, pure eyes like the girl in the legend of 'The Miracle of the Wolf' filled a fresh pitcher and set it down on the threshold.

As Wenzlow still stood there lost in thought, the orderly went back into the kitchen to order tea by signs. To show that he did not give a damn for the people in the kitchen, he pulled up an armchair and in so doing knocked down the old grandmother or whatever that bunch of misery that looked like a lot of old rags was. Then he stretched out his legs and made signs for someone to come and clean his boots. The same girl came up to him. She polished the boots as calmly as the girl in 'The Miracle of the Wolf' had polished the wolves' claws.

Meanwhile Wenzlow sat in his tub, holding up his arms to keep the letter from getting wet.

'My dear Fritz,' wrote Tante Amalie, 'where will you be when you receive this letter? It is difficult to remember those Slavonic names. It is to be hoped you change them all soon to German ones. Though I move the pins on the big map in the dining-room daily according to the newspaper reports, the army is advancing so quickly that I cannot keep up with you. What seems to be the front today on my map becomes overnight the hinterland.

'Now I shall tell you everything about the family that might interest you.'

'Does it really interest me?' thought Wenzlow. 'That's all so far away from me now. No, Tante Amalie is not nearly so far off. I think of that old lady much oftener than of my own wife. It's strange what things come into a man's mind when he's in the thick of the fight.'

'The Malzahns are always telling me that your wife and children are in excellent health.'

A hint that my wife is writing only to her mother, and not to our aunt.

'Grandmother Malzahn has been on a visit to Cassel recently. The boy could be taken for twelve years old, and like you when you were in school, he is better at composition than at sums, and at swimming than gymnastics. He has also won honours and high praise in the Hitler Youth.'

'Strange that I forget even the boy though I'm so proud of him! Just as out in China I forgot that I was the father of three children. What does it mean when at crucial moments in life one thinks of people one never thinks of as a rule?'

'Your wife is tremendously active in relief work which, with the work done by the officers' wives, is under the control of the N.S.D.A.P. Frauenschaft. Of course helping the families of the regiment is part of the wide-scale relief programme for the war effort of the entire nation.'

Wenzlow had to smile at Tante Amalie: she had not forgotten his warning about the censor before he left for the front. Then his smile faded. He thought bitterly: now after the battles of these last days she will be busy enough with that wide-scale relief work which includes the care of regimental families.

'Your little daughter Marianne is, in Frau von Malzahn's opinion, an utterly adorable little brat.'

Wenzlow shouted at his orderly: 'What the hell's going on! Make them keep quiet out there!'

Whereupon the orderly gave the girl who was still polishing his boots a shove in the breast and with a few gestures drove the occupants of the kitchen into the yard. The mother picked up the boy in her arms – he was pale but still breathing. The orderly whistled for the girl to come back and clean the boot he had shoved against her breast. She obeyed with that calm expression in her tearless eyes that were only a little clearer, a little harder. Wenzlow paid no more attention to the noise. It had moved far enough away not to disturb him.

'Your eldest, Anneliese, is certainly going to be a clever girl when she gets over the "tomboy" age.'

'Of course, Tante Amalie is right again. My wife gave herself a lot of unnecessary worry. I notice Anneliese is by no means one of those people I forget quickly. I have never forgotten you, Anneliese, don't ever think so. Marianne, the little brat, I forget – even your little brother. But I have longed to hear about you in particular and Tante Amalie knew that.'

'Your sister, Lenore, is making a great effort to get back into her old nursing profession again.'

'To be sure, there's still Lenore. I had almost forgotten her, but I'm not surprised that she is still there. The others I have forgotten so completely that I am astonished when I hear they are still alive.'

'She is, of course, over the age for nurses at the front, and fortunately, with your victorious advance, there is less need than one expected. She is therefore doing volunteer work in a Berlin hospital. Her son, your nephew, is now on the Eastern Front. I should not be surprised if you met him sometime.'

'My God, what a vague idea poor Tante Amalie has of the

Eastern front! This Helmut probably has the same kind of job with the S.S. that Roennecke has here with me. Is he of the same calibre, I wonder? It was not so long ago he was only a little lad, hero-worshipping me when I came back from China.'

'I hope army life will have a good effect on Helmut. That's what I say every evening to Lenore when she comes home tired from the hospital. She won't be talked out of living with me and even doing the housework for me. Her boy does not write as often from the front as one would expect of an only son. Tell him that, please, if you meet him. For every evening, the moment she comes in the door, his mother asks for the post. She was very disappointed that, on his way back from France, he spent his last leave on the Rhine. But we are glad that, young as he is, he has been promoted so quickly and has received a medal for special merit.'

'He probably has the same medals on his chest as Roennecke and for the same services.' Without realizing what he was doing Wenzlow began to dry himself. In so doing he dropped the letter which became so wet that he flung it on the floor. There was a curious mixture of memories running through his head: the taste of unripe currants; the way Tante Amalie used to punish him when he stole something to eat between meals. He remembered a double punishment once because he blamed the cat for knocking down the pot; the first leave from the cadet school; his pride in his first uniform; the first fear of death before his first battle in World War I; his disillusionment – well concealed – after the first visit to a brothel in Brussels. He remembered his Iron Cross First Class; the grim, overwhelming hatred that had gripped him at the station in Aix-la-Chapelle when a group of working men ripped that Iron Cross off his chest; Klemm, his brother-in-law, leaning over to him: 'You shoot!'; the way the prisoner suddenly turned his face towards them, so impudent, so pale, and the shrill voice: 'Your turn will come too!' A jumbled crowd of memories: orders and words of love; reproaches and children's voices; the smell of the skin, of the earth as they smell only in China; Tante Amalie's thin, bitter kiss on his visit to Potsdam.

There she stood now looking sternly over the edge of his bathtub at him: 'I do not like those objects at the entrance to the village, Fritz.'

'We have to win, Tante Amalie. We have to win the war.'

'Yes, but with weapons, my boy. You have aeroplanes now like birds, tanks . . .'

'We have to go forward. We don't dare to be stopped. We don't

dare to fail again in a winter like this as they did before Moscow. We have had more victories than ever before in our history. You see yourself, that's the way we advance.'

However, Tante Amalie is too old to question his wisdom. Nor does she ask; she sits on her balcony and rejoices over the promotion of her nephew, Helmut.

Wenzlow shivered. The water was cold. He shouted angrily for his orderly to bring him a bath towel.

Sixteen

I

WENZLOW's eldest daughter, Anneliese, laid the week's accounts before the directress of the Home Economics School. It was a long-established school where girls were trained in all branches of housekeeping even up to the management of an estate. From the kitchen where the pupils were at work came the muffled sound of chattering and giggling.

Pots, brass rods, hearth, even the floorstones, were so spotlessly clean that the kitchen looked like an operating-room and Frau von Uhlenhaut in her white gown like a head nurse. Her delicate, ageless face had the proper expression of cheerful patience. Round her neck hung a medallion on a velvet ribbon. The nails of her long slender hands were cut short and oval. As a sign that she was a widow she wore two mourning rings, one over the other, and, in addition, an old, rather clumsy ring, with a stone, that was too tight for her. All this Anneliese observed carefully as she waited behind her chair. For her the result of the weekly display she had arranged by herself was quite important, for it corresponded to an examination. Frau von Uhlenhaut was in the habit of hiding her opinion behind a face always uniformly cheerful. The girl searched that face for the results of her test as attentively as her father tried to read from his commanding officer's face the impression his report had made on him. But the feeling with which she was resigned to

praise or blame, differed from that with which her father waited for the opinion of superior officers.

At school, when she saw a new face among the teachers, she thought: 'We'll see what sort he is, whether I want to be in his good books.' She had not made up her mind what to think of Frau von Uhlenhaut: she could not decide whether to be in this woman's good books or not. She waited to see whether her figures were correct.

Anneliese's mother had sent her away from home where she always had to be on her guard lest the girl gave offence by her strange remarks. The future of Germany demanded the same schooling for daughters of prominent families as for fiancées of officers and clerks and expectant mothers of future sons. For once the nation could support those schools in newly occupied territory.

Though the girl was only in the beginners' class, she was always being given tasks that were supposed to be for older girls. This week she had to arrange the food for the servants on the estate, the maintenance allowance and the slight supplement which was purchased in the little town. Unwillingly as she had entered the school, she soon noticed that here there was a greater risk in cheating than at home and that there were more ways of getting out of the prison her mother had put her in. There were chances too of interesting contacts with all sorts of people.

Frau von Uhlenhaut pushed a sheet of paper across the desk to her. Anneliese sat down on the wooden bench decorated in peasant fashion. The young girls round the hearth noticed how long Anneliese sat at the same table with the teacher.

Now and then Frau von Uhlenhaut gave a quick glance at the girl who sat there chewing her pencil. Anneliese's mother had no idea how well-founded was Wenzlow's fear was that the girl might be a blot on the family escutcheon. To get her admitted even into this school had required, in addition to sealed letter of recommendation, the expert opinion of the Hitler Youth Group. Frau von Uhlenhaut had been warned of this fact, and ordered to keep a sharp eye on the girl. She had been keeping a sharp eye on the girl for some time.

Long ago, immediately after her husband's untimely death, Frau von Uhlenhaut decided to make use of her establishment and founded the school. Through the recommendation of a friend, she had been praised and endorsed by the government. She was now in her sixtieth year and secretly toying with the idea of giving up her distinguished school. Where did all these half-grown girls, to whom she gave year after year a vast amount of knowledge, go when they

graduated? Did they return to their families? Were they submerged in the masses?

In war-time her knowledge of the great world and her stately establishment – knowledge of which she was justly proud because it allowed her to wind her way through the most ridiculous orders seemed to her of very little use. That being the case, she had kept a sharp eye on the new girl as the Hitler Youth ordered. Perhaps it was worth while for the girl's sake not to give up the post to which she was so indifferent; this girl would never marry one of those – Frau von Uhlenhaut suppressed even in thought the right word. No less important, she would not give birth to one of them either. Frau von Uhlenhaut said quickly:

'Don't put the pencil in your mouth.'

She was sorry this girl was going home at Christmas. And as she organized both school and estate activities, for the holidays, her heart was empty, as if a daughter or a younger sister were being taken from her. Anneliese had no idea she would be missed. She merely felt that at home they would not welcome her with the enthusiasm which she had always associated with the holidays, though she was not particularly attached to her home. But this coming reunion with her family roused a hope in the girl again – 'Perhaps I have a home after all?'

Family and city seemed to her completely strange, changed from the very foundations. Fundamentally the change lay in the fact that, instead of keeping pace with her everything had remained static; nothing had changed. Her mother had her hands as full as ever with all sorts of obligations. Just as before the officers' wives read each other letters from fathers and sons. Keeping pace with following the army bulletins, little beflagged pins were moved forward on the big map in the dining-room as before. The pin with a swastika on it, marking the spot where her father presumably was at present, brought memories of him. He had been home on leave during Anneliese's absence; he had been decorated and promoted. The winter's setback seemed more than balanced by the latest advances and the vast amount of territory won. The little red flags at Moscow, the little red point on the Volga, looked insignificant compared with the gigantic line of pins marching forward from the Ukraine, from Africa, even off the map to the befringed writing-table lamp. Her mother talked about hunting out of father's cupboard his old maps of Asia, India and China, for they would soon be needed when their father crossed the Suez Canal and made connections with the African Army.

Anneliese's mother was much annoyed when, every morning, she compared newspaper and radio news with her map to find that there were still a couple of little red flags in the wrong places. It was as offensive to her as a badly hung wallpaper. Though she hoped this defect would soon be remedied, she would often sigh: 'Well, it's lucky that after his last post we can now look for father in the southern Ukraine where everything stays in its place and the winter was not half so grim.' She spread out his package in place of Christmas gifts under the Christmas tree: a heavy white Ukrainian linen, embroidered in red, that was most becoming to Anneliese. By candlelight she put it on over her holiday dress. Peace on earth, good will to men. If their father had not expressly said in his letter that this gift was for both daughters, if it had been left to feminine charm instead of to justice, the mother would have given the whole of the Ukrainian present to the younger girl.

Marianne was taller by a head than her elder sister, who was still short and stout. She had turned out to be as pretty and attractive as she had promised to be. At night, in bed, she liked to talk confidentially to her sister about her youthful love affairs. In Marianne's romantic heart her cousin Helmut von Kelmm's visit played an important part. He had arrived with an S.S. friend, Burkhardt, on their way through Berlin. Burkhardt had made a great impression on Marianne: she could not forget him.

Anneliese was as astonished as if a miracle had transformed her sister. Like all the family, she too wished the Red flags of Stalingrad would retreat behind the Volga. She wished, what everyone else was wishing: that up there above the desk lamp the German line of flags marching from Africa would meet and join with the German flags from Russia. She found it amazing that her sister could think think of love and her mother of celebrations when events so stupendous that they made one gasp were happening. In many parts of Russia the winter was so severe that the soldiers froze like icicles. But even when the snow thawed, even when the glorious German victories continued, how could anyone give a thought to this Burkhardt's jokes? How in this vast, terrifying world of today could things go on in the same old way?

Anneliese's mother and sister spoiled her little brother just as before, grabbing him affectionately by his curly mop of hair till he laughed and showed all his beautiful white teeth. But even this boy with his perfect teeth and his thick head of hair seemed different to Anneliese - not a boy of flesh and blood, but a changeling. She stole away to visit her old teacher, Fräulein Lehnert, the one who had had

trouble with the authorities, especially with the sort of people known as German Christians. Fräulein Lehnert welcomed her former pupil gaily: she was proud that Anneliese had remembered her. What were the quarrels of bygone days compared to the one that today held the nation together? Could one compare the dissensions of the German Christians with the enemy now threatening all Europe! The girl listened to Fräulein Lehnert in silence; she did not know what to say in reply and she had no question she cared to ask. Neither was she sure which things she should contradict nor which to agree with. Finally she enquired, in embarrassment, for the school rector, Pastor Schroeder. Fräulein Lehnert assured her she knew nothing about him.

There was no one now to whom the girl could go with the questions that puzzled her. She trotted home undecided what to do. The whole city seemed to cry out to her: 'You are alone'. Where was the school chaplain now? Under the earth? In a work battalion? In a concentration camp? Perhaps, like Fräulein Lehnert, forgetting old misunderstandings, he had volunteered for the army long ago. At night, in bed, Anneliese longed for her sister's babbling about this S.S. Lieutenant Burkhart to stop so that, as she fell asleep, she could think her own thoughts for a few minutes. She thought often of death nowadays. What was this thing she suddenly felt in every fibre? Nothing at all or everything? Was it a shadow or eternity itself?

One thing seemed strange to her: people knew so little about death. They could never give her any information; apparently they has never given it much thought. When letters from the front did not come for days, her mother wandered sleeplessly about the house at night. But even her father who, one might say, was in constant touch with death, would write about a thousand curious details, but say nothing of the most important thing. He used the word 'Fallen' enough, with many descriptions and observations; but what did he think about it? Did it mean to him just – done for, finished? Or did it mean, the eternal judgment seat? And when tanks rumbled and bombs burst, did he think simply – the end? Ashes to ashes? Dust to dust? And afterwards nothing more? There, was, however, a difference, but of that no one ever wrote or talked.

It seemed to her that people did not even think about death when all the flags were flying at half mast, when everyone went about dressed in black, looking sad and mournful. She had returned to her school before the national day of mourning in memory of the defeat of the Stalingrad Army. With her fellow pupils and the personnel

of the estate she listened, silently and earnestly, to the speeches from the school governors and Party members exhorting them to bear up under one of those tragedies that are unavoidable in great wars. In defeat even more than in victory, they said, is the spirit of a nation revealed. The way they took their defeat influenced the further course of the war. Along with all the others she had listened, silently and earnestly, to praises of the men who had not hesitated to sacrifice their lives that the nation might live on. In so doing, those heroes had given the entire nation an example of how to bear defeat. Defeat, and the bearing of defeat; sacrificing one's life that the nation might live on. Funeral marches, sad faces, the gloomy voice of the speaker – but what about the many, many dead? The nation's grief did not follow them beyond death. What was death? What was the truth? What lies? And there was her little sister, Marianne, lying at night on her bed and dreaming of her Burkhart. But she, Anneliese, was cut to the quick by the funeral march. With clenched teeth she felt the relentless threat in it. But so grave, so decorous was her bearing that no one in the drawing-room paid any attention to her.

Frau von Uhlenlaut, she too, wearing black under her nurse's gown, with a black velvet band round her wrinkled throat, kept her eyes on the little girl. She noted the pale little face between the two stiff pigtailed, the way she was clenching her teeth. She would have given a great deal to know exactly what was going on in the child's head. All those girls, usually so merry, today so serious, could look forward in a world almost completely under the heel of the conqueror to hundreds of positions in which to work, to love and to bear children. She herself until today had looked forward to spending the rest of her life in that same world which she did not like, but which was victorious. Now all of a sudden, she realized that defeat was still possible in her lifetime. As she listened to the funeral march she experienced a curious mixture of guilt and remorse because she had allowed all these many girls entrusted to her care to grow up, undisturbed, in the madness of a conquered plundered world. She did not dare even now to shake their beliefs that that defeat at Stalingrad was merely an unavoidable blow in the midst of a great war. At that moment she knew clearly, with an even deeper feeling of guilt, why she dared not do so. The reason was that the Nazi government was more powerful than ever and she was afraid of being punished for a word. She had still a stronger sense of guilt and felt still greater remorse because she could not offer better protection to this squat little pigtailed girl who was dearer to her than all the others.

No matter how long Hans lived, he would always be surprised by the same thought: 'I actually shot at them.' Though he was now in his third year on the Eastern front, his surprise was just as keen as before he actually had shot. The very thing he had considered impossible before, had happened. He had not only fired his first shot but countless other shots as well. Nor were they merely shots into the blue: he had seen, in close fighting, the man he was shooting at. He had been so close that he could see the hammer and sickle; yet he had fired the shot. He had recognized the insignia and yet he had fired. He had saluted those symbols, as a child at so many, many points in the city: at home; on the street, on flags; on school tablets, painted in lamp-black on the snow. Yet, in spite of all that he had shot at the hammer and sickle, because all the others had shot at it too. Why had they all done that? Once he had read an incredible statement: 'A new war is unavoidable. Once again the people will let themselves be fooled; once again men will shoot to kill. Again we shall be betrayed.' He had not believed it possible. And somewhere he had read: 'One among you will betray me.' He could not believe that either. How can you betray someone if you know beforehand you are going to do it? Why was he, just he, the only one? It did not make him feel any better that a couple of million others were also there. Whether there were dozens or millions, he, and no one else, was the one.

The Red machine gun pointed straight at his machine gun. On this side and the other they had loaded, aimed and fired. He could as little have stepped out of the lines as a single wave could step out of a deluge. If the men on the other side had fired their shot a second sooner, there would have been nothing left of Hans and his comrades.

What difference would that have meant? Did he care so much about living? He had often gambled with his life in war and in peace. He had thought he was brave because he had never been able to imagine that his life might come to an end. He had always thought: 'I'll pull through, don't worry about me, Mother.' But at home, even when he thought 'If the Gestapo grabs me, it's all over', the thought had never come to him that life could be entirely finished. Many had had that thought, but not Hans. With him or without him life went on; unbroken, deep and sparkling. His own life was only a tiny fraction of the whole. Then suddenly everything had changed. Life was neither deep nor sparkling; it was only him-

self. That, too, would have stopped if the Red gunner at the machine gun had fired at him first. Now he had murdered the very thing for which he had thought to give his life a thousand times. Suddenly he jumped up and shouted:

'I say, where's Zimmering?'

'Got a slight wound. He's coming back.'

They lay packed like sardines in a barn. The night was suffocating; machine-gun fire and always that maddening flak. 'Shut up,' someone growled as if Hans's question were the only disturbance in the night. He rolled over on the other side. He was the only one still awake. However he was glad Zimmering was coming back tomorrow. Zimmering had shot at them too: so he, Hans, was not alone. But after all, he was alone, for if his bullet had found its mark, the fact remained that it had been his bullet and no other man's. Two thousand five hundred men had fired their guns at the same second. They had swept the whole terrain clean. But whoever the man was, now rotting on the ground, the bullet that killed him had been Hans's. The dead man might be nothing but dust now but one bullet, one only, had severed his life-cord. That bullet bore the name 'Hans'.

All that had happened a long time ago. Since then the name 'Hans' had been marked on many thousands of bullets. He also wore a decoration. What for? Wherever he went innumerable shadows swarmed about him like vultures swooping over a carcass. He heard in dreams the rush of those birds of death flinging themselves at him, pecking him. They had as little pity for him as the winged ghosts of the dead have for the living. They peck at you and croak: 'Fly away with us.' He had had so little of life, had loved so few people; perhaps no one really but his mother and possibly Emmi a little too. She wrote to him sometimes.

The wrinkled face of that peasant woman who had been made to work so hard from morning to night in the Polish quarter cropped up in his thoughts. The gleam in her faded eyes seemed to say: 'You beast, now you'll get it!'

But it did not look at all as though they would. They had rolled into Russia, driving before them dust-clouds of fugitives escaping with their livestock to the East. And tanks, swifter than any motorized S.S., had mowed down cattle and children. The people who had fled the fastest were bombed by planes. It did not look as if the thing the old woman hoped for would come to pass. Hans saw the light fade from her eyes. He saw the same woman weeping in the way blind people weep. In the winter he had sometimes seen her

eyes glitter in the snow. Lieutenant Schellman, wounded, fell from his horse and froze to death under mounds of snow. They had first recognized his hand from the curious ring they all knew – then, a part of the horse's body, and two or three fingers with rings on them still sticking out of the snow. Schellman had laughed that time when the old farmer's wife from the Polish village was run so ragged that she almost danced. 'Look lively, old woman!' he had cried. Now the old woman danced up and down on the snow as if she were dancing on his grave. Her eyes sparkled again: 'Now it's coming!' But still it did not come. For a third time a film veiled her eyes. The officers talked among themselves. They must not make the same mistake as Napoleon who had been foolish enough to march on Moscow and thus bring about his downfall. Even Franco in Spain had not aspired to Madrid; he had let the Reds have it. In the end Madrid had fallen into his lap of itself. Just as Moscow and Leningrad would fall of themselves into the laps of the Germans when the whole Soviet Union cracked up. They already held the heart of the land: the grain and oil regions.

Hans missed Zimmering bitterly – he had gone off for a few hours to have his wound bandaged. Zimmering always knew what to do and what not to do no matter what the occasion. He had talked his younger friend out of trying to make contact with the guerrillas. The year before it had been possible for a single individual to slip into the guerrilla territory, now part of the occupied zone to their rear. He could also have been left behind in the village of Tscherkoeje, when it changed hands a couple of times, and have gone off with the Russians.

'You aren't helping anyone but yourself by doing that. We need to do much more. We must take a lot more men with us, not just us two.'

It seemed to Hans that this great strong fellow never had any doubts. He did not even seem to mind when he had to carry out disgusting orders such as driving the last cow out of the stable, for instance, or gathering up the last scrap of flour, or herding a whole family together. He could carry out his orders so unconcernedly that Hans often wondered uneasily: 'Doesn't it make him feel bad? He does it so easily because it means nothing to him. 'Whenever he was given an order that would rob a family and a village of their last possession, Hans took pains to carry it out as lackadaisically as possible. The trouble was, when he overlooked a milk delivery or a collection of felt shoes or wool blankets, when he forgot to report a calf slaughtered secretly, there was always someone on the spot to make good what he had purposely left undone. When two such

omissions were discovered, he had to be on the alert. Zimmering said: 'There you are! If you're the only fellow in the company to carry out sabotage, if you don't first persuade some other men to work with you, you may be helping your own conscience, but you're not helping to end the war.'

In peacetime it had been easy to live on two planes. Illegal practices demanded cunning and a thousand ruses and much courage. There were always a couple of men who knew who you really were – usually the couple on whom everything depended. In war you were alone among millions; and no one knew, except Zimmering, and perhaps, little by little, one or two others – but then only in part. The real self was as well hidden as if it were not there any more. When Zimmering said 'I'm saving myself for the most important thing', Hans worried for fear he would be killed and no one on earth would know who he really had been. In the past he had been proud of his cunning. He had managed to keep clear of suspicion better than most. He had never been in any camp. Perhaps it was easier to be in a fatigue battalion searching for mines in no-man's-land. Then you would be among your own kind: you wouldn't live and die alone.

Zimmering had been a restraining influence on Hans when they entered the village. The man beside him, a certain Stimpert, said:

'You must admit it was a funny feeling when they ordered "Fire" yesterday for the first time.'

Even less than the question did Hans like the glance out of the corner of the man's eye. He said:

'Funny, why?'

But Zimmering, who was marching on Stimpert's left, picked the question up at once and answered it as such questions should be answered:

'You're quite right. It certainly was funny.'

Stimpert peered out of the corner of his left eye at the face that was both hard and sensitive. Zimmering went on calmly: 'Of course, every man has a strange feeling when all the talking and writing, all the diplomatic tricks and agreements, are over at last and the truth comes out and actual orders, and the shooting begins.' And he went on at great length, though by this time the spy, relaxed and bored, was staring straight ahead – obviously there there was nothing special to report about these two men.

Their outfit was motorized and dashed across the Ukraine in furious forced marches. Whenever the enemy hurled themselves at

them in an effort to stop the advance, they flung them back in a few hours or at the most in a few days. They crossed the Dnieper. Engineers had thrown the bridges together as fast and the army had passed over them as quickly as if the officers' orders contained a special magic bestowed on them by the supreme commander, the Fuehrer. That advance, sweeping irresistibly over the land, would almost have made them believe in a power neither guns nor despair could withstand, had it not been that even in their own ranks many a man paid with his life, a harsh reminder that even the magician himself was not proof against death. The Russians had blown up their mighty dam, and over the fruitful fields flowed a sea in which floated the dead of both armies, the remains of villages, cattle, horses, planks, ploughs and all sorts of household belongings. But not even the sacrifice of the dam on which the youth of the nation had staked their strength and their future was enough to halt the advance. All it did was to swing the Germans a little more towards the south-east.

Now for weeks they had been marching through the richest terrain, through waving grain-fields, where villages that looked peaceful from a distance, swam like little islands. This was a fabulous fairyland compared to the miserable sand in the Mark Brandenburg which Hans had up to now taken for land. And all this fairyland of gold and dark brown was Soviet earth. That was the land without masters and slaves, where everyone could eat his fill. Close on the heels of the German soldiers came the newly enfeoffed families among whom the conquered land was to be divided. The young men of the villages, all those who did not have to mow and plough for their new masters, were herded together and shipped off to Germany. Hans listened to the talk of the soldiers drunk at the sight of so much rich earth. They thrust their hands greedily into it. Here a man could begin to understand how thirsty and parched the German earth was and why it was so important to have the grain of this land.

At night Hans said to Zimmering:

'I always thought before that life went on for ever. Not in the clouds, but on earth. Now sometimes I'm afraid that when I'm bumped off that'll be the end. Kettler used to have a little spark of something, didn't he? Now the little spark has gone out too. How he liked to make up those fat packages he sent home to his old people! But back at home he was afraid to fire the right shots. Here he shoots on command.'

'He does it as long as we're winning. He won't begin to think differently till things go wrong.'

'How can you know whether they'll go wrong or not? How d'you know we won't keep on going forward till we march right into Asia?'

'I don't want to think so and I don't think so; for when you believe that you're helping the victory, and when you don't believe it you hold them back. The Russian doesn't want to believe it, so he doesn't.'

'Why spare ourselves when there are only the two of us? You say, for the most important thing. When is it going to come, eh? Perhaps the most important thing at this minute is to give the others an example. If we're obliged to requisition a village and I refuse to obey, well and good, they'll stand me up against the wall.'

'It isn't true that the little spark in Kettler has gone out. You just haven't kept blowing on it. And if they stand you up against the wall, you won't be able to do it. A dead man can't blow on anything.' Hans saw that Stimpert was listening to them. What are those two always hanging around together for?

Zimmering quickly caught his warning glance. He said: 'We've just been talking about life after death.'

'About what?' Stimpert sauntered up, highly amused.

'About life after death. Say, comrade, do you believe there is any?'

'No. Not the way the priests believe,' said Stimpert. 'When a man falls in battle he lives on in his nation. What he fought for will go on being fought for.' Though he was laughing, one could see he was expressing an idea he had often puzzled over.

'You mean,' asked Zimmering, 'if a German dies he lives on in the German people? And if Mussolini dies he lives on in the Italian people? And the Mikado what's-his-name, in the Japanese? And a Russian?'

'A Russian has no soul; he hasn't really lived. He dies and his nation is the smaller, because when a Russian has died he is really dead.'

A couple of men had moved up to listen to them.

'I'd just like to know,' said the man named Binder, 'why they fought like the devil!'

Hans had known Binder ever since they played marbles together. He had been cleverer at tricks than any of the other boys. He now wore a decoration for bravery.

'I've told you that again and again,' said Stimpert. 'A tiger bites and claws like a demon to the very last, but he doesn't get any medal for bravery. A wolf doesn't get a promotion, but he defends himself to the death. People call it the struggle for existence. A wolf also

sleeps with his she-wolf – they call it preservation of the species. He gives her little ones, but not with any thought for posterity. It's hard for us to put ourselves in the place of a race that borders on the animal kingdom.'

At night Hans asked: 'Do you think they believe all that? Binder went to the same school with me. We had the same teacher. His father was Red; his brother may be in a concentration camp. And you and I? If I hadn't run into that Martin I've often told you about, what do you think I'd believe? And does Binder still believe that nonsense?'

'He does and he doesn't. Perhaps deep in his heart there's a spot where he doesn't quite believe it. But no one ever gets near that spot. Now, while the fighting's going on, he has to believe it. If he didn't, his life would be like smoke, dead even before he dies. So he'd rather believe his life was something special than that it would all come to nothing. And you and I? If you hadn't run into this Martin, you would have met another Martin. Once you began puzzling about things, you insisted upon knowing the truth. There was no stopping you, either with orders, bribes, decorations, or promotions.'

Hans had often wondered to himself: 'Where can Martin be – perhaps on the other side? Perhaps I myself have killed him. Perhaps he fell long ago in Spain. I shall have to make shift with Zimmering.'

They marched away towards the south. The name of the Black Sea was frequently mentioned in their conversations – was it black, was it blue? – and new parts of the world, new rivers, new cities, they had never known existed. Why, it was even possible that they might meet their friends and brothers somewhere in Africa which once was so incredibly far away but now was quite near, almost within reach. Many began measuring off the distance on the map.

The autumn was so golden it was hard to realize that this gold too would vanish. Into the faces of the peasants who stared at the strange soldiers came a new expression, carried perhaps on the wind that ruffled their shawls and their hair, while it scarcely stirred the heavy coats of the soldiers. Now the vast sky, as endless as the earth, began to grow dark earlier than usual in the afternoon. Not till later did they learn that for some time the sun had not set. The western sky shone bright, and everything beneath it was golden and smooth. Till now it seemed as if the winter had avoided them; but now the army had apparently come to a standstill; they felt as if they were

moving forward an inch at a time, as if they were merely pawing the ground in one spot as slowly, slowly the snow came to meet them.

At first it was as fine as flour, this snow that sifted down on fields and woods, covering them. And all at once Hans understood what the peasants had been waiting for when, gritting their teeth, they had been pressed into forced labour. They had looked up at the sky, even that woman whom they had recently strung up on the gallows on their march through the village square; for just before she mounted the steps she had raised her eyes to the sky. In her expression there had been none of the hope one turns on the Great Beyond; perhaps, thought Hans, even when she had the rope around her neck she had foreseen the grey twilight now settling down at last over them all.

They marched into Odessa. Once before in his life – long, long ago – Hans had ducked his head on those harbour steps, and giant boots had trampled him. That time Martin put his arm protectively around his shoulders. Perhaps many of the boys who were now tramping down the harbour as victors had sat before the same cinema picture *Armoured Cruiser Potemkin*. If one's memory of one's own experience is slight, the memory of the picture of some other person's experience is as faint as a breath. But not so with Hans. He felt as if he were doubly present; the boots were his own boots, tramping down those steps, and at the same time he could feel the pressure of those devilish boots trampling him till his bones cracked.

Zimmering had warned him again and again: 'You've got to obey or you'll be shot! Then you're out of the picture. You can't bring any more men over to the opposite side then.' Hans hated this double life; he wanted to be just himself; he did not trust even his friend when he said their twice-lived lives could suddenly flow into one mould. In France he himself had thought he could influence a group of men to revolt, as they did in World War I. Here he was alone; and he could not fight alone against the power which seemed as hard to break as the power that drove the storm and the snow. How had they got hold of them? Who had gained by this pell-mell rush to the East? Hans had not known that so much murder and fire could come out of mankind when one pressed the lever. He would never have suspected little Binder with whom he had played marbles. But he should have known it; he should have known him better.

Hans's face did not look like a fox's now; the lights that used to play round his eyes had faded.

The battle for the city was now so far behind them that the German soldiers were beginning to feel almost at home, in so far as one can feel at home beside a holocaust. Then an explosion on Dock Eight reminded them that the captured city was still, in spots, uncaptured. Then came the usual series of arrests and shootings that came as naturally under the laws of war as disease and death come under the laws of health. A brief lull for observation was followed by an unexpected raid, and the people who had crept away to hide in cellars and ruins knew that the number of victims had been calculated in advance. The soldiers detailed for the raid were all men who believed they had been in danger and saved only by accident; they saw nothing wrong with the idea that every man in this enemy city was their enemy and that every enemy must be destroyed. As destroying them all was impossible, they concentrated on a fraction of them. They carried out the order either from a list of names drawn by lot or merely as the mood seized them.

Hans was in the squad detailed to surround a block of houses. While the arrest was being made one man escaped, but he could not get out of the block. The more thoroughly he was hunted, the more difficult it was to find him. And the longer they were obliged to continue their search, the more reasons they found for doing so. The more invisible he remained, the clearer it became that he was a ringleader and a saboteur. He could not have vanished into thin air. He had fled from hiding-place to hiding-place. Threats were of no avail. The dwellers in the block of houses were warned that they would all have to pay with their lives if the fugitive were not captured by nightfall. At that threat, all the people cowering in cellars and ruins dropped whatever they were doing and sat motionless, stunned into the rigidity of unconsciousness but making it clear to police spies that they could not count on civilian co-operation. Ancient crones, frivolous young women, even the most stupid children – all refrained from any action that might be suspected of giving aid. Their only fear was that the threats and the wild searching around them would be interrupted by a sudden shout of triumph.

Seven o'clock was the deadline. At six, a last search was made in every nook and corner. The rage of the lieutenant, to whom failure was a scandal, spurred on his squad as if the impossibility of finding the fugitive were a disgrace to them all. They turned every cupboard inside out; blows and cuffs rained right and left, and the silent people under guard were beaten with rifle butts. Part of the squad which had earlier surrounded the block and been relieved

was transferred to the search party. Hans entered a roofless room in which only two walls were left standing. Fragments of the stove blockaded the hole through which one had to pass. The inhabitants had been herded together in the courtyard or elsewhere, the dead had been carried off with the exception of a few fragments of a corpse mingled with broken furniture that filled what had once passed for a room. The soldiers poked around in the heap of debris; they ripped up the floor and Hans was ordered to tear a pipe out of the wall. Two boots projected from the groove in which the pipe had stood. No matter how hard the fellow tried, the man hiding in the groove could not find room enough to pull his knees higher as Hans tore out a piece of pipe. Though there was practically no air in this hole, Hans saw that the man must still be alive. At that moment the sergeant stuck his head in the room. He was in a rage. Like everyone else, he had hoped to find the man in the particular quarter he had been ordered to search, and he gave his men no peace. Hans stepped in front of the opening and quickly shoved back the pipe in its old place. He did not know whether the man hiding there was afraid of being pulled out by the legs. He did not even know whether the man had noticed that he had protected him. Hans had seen nothing of him but the boots, and those only from the heels to the ankles. He did not know whether he was young or old. He knew as little about him as about the man his bullet had hit. Joining the others, he now went on searching for the fugitive whom he knew they never would find.

The house search was broken off. The fugitive had been hidden away – or he had hidden himself, as many thought at first. Then someone said he had been found. He had come out of hiding to save the other people in the house. Such a thought would never occur to the Russians, Sievert declared. Ultimately every hiding-place is discoverable. Someone said the fugitive was not a man, but a middle-aged woman. She had lain beneath a floorboard under the bed. Hans never managed to see her. He could only imagine how she had hidden for hours in her dungeon under the bed, overhearing everything, weighing her duty and finally deciding to crawl out and give herself up.

Suddenly they were ordered away from the south. Rumour had it, before they knew any details, that they were needed up in Stalin-grad. The thicker and heavier the snow became, the thicker and heavier the rumours. They were surprised to hear of names of men who had long since been reported captured. The ground shook, at

first imperceptibly then alarmingly, from a battle as invisible as if it were being fought inside the earth instead of on top amid ice-covered villages. They certainly could not be anywhere near Stalingrad; they were still much too far south. The officers knew before the men that they would be thrown into the fighting in order to break, from the outside, the ring that had been thrown around the German army in Stalingrad. The Reds had cut them off. Now they turned to face the Germans pushing forward against the ring from the south.

No longer did the ridges in the hard, frozen ground run with milk and honey, but with thick blood. No longer did the soldiers sink their teeth into juicy mouthfuls but into icy air. Sometimes they evacuated a village so quickly that they scarcely had a chance to burn their papers. Kettler had no booty now to send home to his old woman. He snorted and stared wide-eyed, hopelessly, out of a purple face.

Hans again kept as close as possible to Zimmering. A nod or a glance was sufficient. They understood one another. Zimmering's eyes gleamed with the same bright spots as the eyes of the old witch: 'Now it's come, now it's beginning.'

But it had not come yet. The old orders swept the troops onward as a gale sweeps dried leaves. The German breakthrough was not successful – not because the leaves suddenly hesitated in the hurricane but because a wall of rock rose up and broke the force of the gale.

Zimmering was now the one to suggest that they should seize their first opportunity to desert to the other side. 'So he himself has given up thinking he can bring the others over,' thought Hans. 'He has given up thinking he must save himself for the most important thing.'

In the beginning, when it became clear that the attempted breakthrough had failed, Zimmering still had hopes of many of the men. Above all of Kettler, of whom he had said before: 'He won't think it over till things go wrong.' At first, Kettler had been down in the mouth and desperate; then he had begun to curse openly. He had announced all too frankly what he wanted. Zimmering had told no one but Hans of his plan. He too had given up Kettler. One couldn't use him – a fellow who couldn't keep anything to himself. His nerves had gone completely to pieces.

Zimmering, meantime, had no idea that Kettler had been called up for questioning. Kettler's first idea had been to join Zimmering, whose plan he sensed rather than knew. They had exchanged a couple of words on occasions. Then Stimpert had called Kettler

aside. In spite of Zimmering's zeal, Stimpert distrusted him from certain infinitesimal signs that were difficult to seize and to prove. Kettler was not sly; he was rough and stupid. He had admitted the content of the conversation which Stimpert alleged he was 'repeating', though he had made it up from guesswork. Kettler had gone away feeling that you could not hide anything from Stimpert. That was why, though constantly in danger of death, he obeyed Stimpert's orders to draw Zimmering out. Though he got nothing out of Kettler, Stimpert now felt confirmed in his suspicion. He needed no further reason for not letting Zimmering out of sight.

Hans wrote to his mother not to worry if she did not hear from him for a long time. In the last war people sometimes got lost; not till much later did anyone learn what had become of them.

He kept close to his friend. Even in the past year there had been opportunities for getting in touch with guerrillas, for slipping off on this or that path and lying low till the enemy covered the region. Now every man was stuck in his own particular red-hot iron net. Nowadays a flaming girdle of tanks separated one from the enemy. A slight change in position – and you ran into the fire of your own artillery! Hans knew that his own people were mowed down by their own retreating tanks. The magic had failed. The order to cut their way through the enemy had no more power than orders from men seeking desperately to postpone the collapse. Many an officer showed his dismay at having to transmit orders impossible to execute. If there were any superhuman power on earth, it no longer flowed from the invisible ever-present Fuehrer, but from the thick grey sky whence fell the snow, endlessly, remorselessly. With his own eyes Hans saw Stimpert fire his army revolver at Zimmering's back. Stimpert must have discovered Zimmering's secret plan. At the same moment Hans was almost knocked down by a blow that seemed to come from the inside of the earth. He felt himself all over: he was whole; but the comrades with whom he had lain were a confused mass of mangled flesh. One of them had grabbed the man next him by the hair with the one hand still left him; his own head was missing. Stimpert had fallen forward against Zimmering's back at which he had just shot. His skull was split in two, but the face in the shattered skull even now wore an expression as if in the Beyond it was the man's duty to spy on the pulpy remains of the five men strewn around him.

The few comrades left alive said of Hans that he was bullet-proof. He came out of his shock slowly – he felt no despair now but only a sort of reproach of the dead. From now on he was much more alone

than he had dreamed any human being could be. He had no one but himself. He made up his mind to obey his own will, boldly and completely, as he had never obeyed any other man.

A few days later he wrote to his mother that he had just gone through a couple of bad days again; his best friend had had to pay the price; he himself was all right. She could count confidently on seeing him home again, safe and sound.

III

Geschke was now working in a munitions factory – something which he had avoided doing as long as possible. First of all, his pay was lower than for the old work. Marie met this discrepancy as even-temperedly as she had met all difficulties in life. Her worry about her son made all other troubles wholly unimportant. In the beginning it was hard for Geschke to come up to the prescribed standard. After working out of doors all his life on a job demanding prudence and skill, he loathed the monotony of the stuffy factory. After a relatively short time, however, he had become quite proficient; he could even have gone on to a better-paid job. But in his department there were a couple of men who worked slowly and more awkwardly than he, chiefly a certain Beringer, whom he had known for years at the garage, and once had even met at a Party gathering. Beringer had always been on good terms with everybody because of his amusing remarks about things and people. When Hitler came into power he had quickly got into line. 'What else do you expect,' he said, 'they're going to be around here a long time.'

Geschke felt a dislike that bordered on loathing for Beringer and his funny remarks. He was almost glad when the man failed to make the grade at the factory. With his pay he certainly could not feed small children and grandchildren. By his constant hesitation which happened when the piece to be finished passed him, Beringer was always holding up the whole line. This pleased only laggards; the others growled at the resulting reduction in pay. The foreman cursed; the factory manager declared the delay was intentional.

Geschke had no desire to work as hard as the Nazis demanded, and, in spite of his dislike of the man, he slowed his pace to Beringer's. Little by little a number of other men regulated their pace by Geschke's. Beringer was grateful to Geschke because he felt his support.

The factory manager raged. In many departments the old ghost – solidarity – was not dead yet. Instead of setting their pace by the

fastest and strongest, this dirty old catchword still encouraged some German workers to adjust themselves to the weakest and slowest among them. This move endangered many departments: the Fuehrer principle demanded from nation, factory, and individual the highest peak of production. Solidarity forced production down to the standard of the weakest and poorest worker; anyway it was only a hangover from all the Jewish-Christian twaddle.

Geschke was usually bored at such meetings; now he suddenly began to pay close attention. The speaker had touched his heart. Little as Geschke had read or reflected, the man had now let fall an idea that unconsciously made a deep impression on him. He did not need to study Marx or read the Bible to understand what solidarity meant. In his garrulousness the speaker had said something Geschke had long ago glimpsed but only now fully understood. He was so excited that he let himself be stopped on the way home by an older workman, Diepold, who asked whether he would like to walk a little way with him. Geschke scarcely knew Diepold; he did not even know why he gladly accepted his proposal. He had certainly not been aware that this Diepold had been secretly watching him for a long time. At his age he never felt the need for friendship. And all of a sudden, here he had a friend.

Weeks had passed and Marie had not had a letter from the front. She sat at the kitchen window with the work Tante Emilie gave her. The traffic rolling past down below on the Belle Alliance Platz melted together in one mass in which only a tiny speck interested her – the postman. Once she caught sight of him, she flung away her work and rushed to the house door to stand listening and counting the minutes till he arrived. Again – nothing. The information that mail from the front was barred from several directions did not comfort her in the least. That was a sign that the fighting was now particularly hot there. As she sat down again to sew, she heard something fall and voices and doors banging. Like Marie, the woman on the second floor had waited for weeks for a letter from her eldest son. Now the news had come – Fallen. A neighbour put the woman to bed and her daughter, the same girl who years ago as a baby had kept Geschke from sleeping by her howling, comforted her mother and caressed her. Her husband was, they learned later in the house, an old Party member, an 'old campaigner'. Even after Hitler's rise to power he had kept his Party membership a secret for a long time because the poison was still not eradicated from the house. That evening the woman regained consciousness, and while her husband and her sister-in-law were sitting with her, she had

another attack of despair that could be heard all over the house.

'It's all the fault of your Hitler,' she screamed, 'you were always so proud of him.' The next day the woman was suddenly hailed before the People's Court. The people in the house muttered darkly that the little sister-in-law was to blame; she and the woman's husband had been rabid Nazis from early days. The woman was freed, perhaps because of her husband's spotless reputation. The people in the house said that hussy of a sister-in-law wouldn't dare to show her face at the door. But when she came in as cheerful as ever, with her prominent breasts and her neat little behind which the men in the house would like to have tanned for her, they let her pass in silence. At first they did not speak to her, but even that they hastily made good when she turned coldly away. That evening they said: 'Why should we get ourselves in trouble for the wife of an "old campaigner"?' They had expected husband and wife would put the sister-in-law out of the house, but that did not happen either. Instead, they invited her to stay to dinner. The man pointed out to his wife that in her grief she had let slip unconsidered words which she herself did not believe. Her sister-in-law had been obliged to do her duty. What would become of a nation if everyone gave way to his or her despair? To be sure, her husband was removed from his position of trust in the factory but he was soon transferred to another factory. The woman herself was submissive and quiet, since the word 'divorce' had come up between them. She complained loudly about fate and the Russians and the Jews. That had all happened in the days when Marie was waiting for news.

Marie's face was pale and worn from waiting. Geschke looked at her every evening: still nothing.

'I have a strong feeling he is alive,' he said.

'Why?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'It's just a feeling.' He had no such feeling at all: he just wanted to say some thing comforting.

She was called out into the hall: letters from the front. A bitter disappointment! The letter was from Franz. He was well. He only complained about being still near Prague, when now every man was needed in Russia and it was his dearest wish to be able to fight there. He hinted that he might have an important manager's position in a large factory behind Prague.

'What's he boasting about now?' said Geschke. He laughed at the boy's complaints; he had almost the same work as at home. 'Because he always worked in a factory, they put him in one now too.'

He'll have to work just as hard there as we do, and he'll be just as likely to be bombed out too.'

'He always wanted something special,' Marie said. 'That's his trouble now. He thinks he is different because he denounces others.'

'Of course,' said Geschke. 'Every boy has a little meanness in him at some time. Usually you beat it out of them. Nowadays all the rottenness is rewarded.'

One evening he found his wife waiting at the subway steps; he saw from her face that she had a letter. In spite of the cold weather, they sat down under the bare trees. Marie wept over the letter. It was the one in which Hans wrote that she must not despair if he suddenly disappeared. Geschke read the letter through carefully twice. He comforted his wife for she was shaking from anxiety and cold. 'The boy is right; he'll come through somehow.' After he had read the letter again, he discovered various things between the lines. 'Perhaps it's beginning the way it did in the last war. Then one man after the other ended by taking French leave. Perhaps he'll have luck.' Marie shook her head. 'How can I live without a sign of life from him? He can't just suddenly disappear.'

The people in the house asked why she was crying. She had had a letter at last and she cried. The letter went from hand to hand.

Franz sent her a package full of warm woollen things. The women felt everything between their fingers; there were a pair of stockings and a woman's coat. Frau Melzer said:

'They swindled all that out of the Czech women over there. It's just as cold here and we can use it.'

Marie looked calmly at Frau Melzer. She did not say a word. The women stared at Marie's forehead, drawn together in a frown. The old spirit in the house had crawled out of its corner again; it slid over the stair landings; it saw fingers feeling the woollen material; it saw frowning foreheads.

That same evening Marie wrote to her stepson, Franz:

'I thank you for the beautiful woollen things. I unravelled them all at once. I shall knit you a vest from the wool. Of course, it is cold here too. But I do not want to wear it. You wear it yourself!'

Geschke read all letters, incoming and outgoing. He laughed and said: 'That's the sort of letter his own mother would have written to him too.' Such praise he had never given her before.

A few weeks later she waited for her husband at the subway station again. This time she was not crying, it is true, for this new letter stirred in her heart a boundless relief.

Geschke read it. He said drily:
'He had something planned that did not come off.'

IV

Wenzlow raised his right arm from the desk in a gesture half-way between a Hitler salute and joyful surprise. Fahrenberg, his adjutant, had just walked in unexpectedly, his head bandaged, holding himself stiffly erect because of the plaster cast in which the upper part of his body was encased.

'This is wonderful, my boy! How did you get away?'

'At your orders, Major! Risen from the dead.'

Wenzlow sent word for his orderly to serve breakfast for two. They sat facing each other at the window overlooking the sunny square. The German government house lay directly opposite, behind the trees. A flock of sparrows swooped out of the foliage as the sentries crossed each other, and swooped back once more when the sentries passed again on their rounds. Exactly opposite, in the courtyard of an almost undamaged house stood a strange object at the sight of which the adjutant wrinkled his forehead. It was not, however, a gallows, but some sort of gymnastic apparatus. The house directly across the way was a school, and a group of pupils was now crossing the square, led by a woman whose clear and unmistakably German voice reminded the children of the prescribed salute as they passed the guards in front of the government house.

Fahrenberg told his Major that he had been able to prolong his sojourn in the hospital, by all sorts of tricks until he could arrange to be sent back here instead of home on sick leave. Wenzlow laughed. He was pleased that this young man reciprocated his feelings. In the hard winter weeks he had grown fonder of him than ever. Their regiment had been detailed to divert the Russian forces on the long, grim retreat. Now they were getting their breath in the little town into which, only a year ago, they had marched on their advance. The village, where they had spent their first Russian winter, lay only a few kilometres to the west. There had been unpleasant discussions with a certain Roennecke from the S.S., but the discussions had gone up in smoke, and so had Roennecke himself. Collapsing suddenly, he had died within a few days from a fever. Fahrenberg had been transferred that winter at his own request, with Wenzlow's help, though Wenzlow depended upon him. He had been sent to the regiment that covered the retreat by holding up the Russians as long as possible. The regiment was cut off. With four men - two

privates and two S.S. officers – Fahrenberg had tried to fight his way through the enemy lines to get reinforcements and arrange to have food and weapons dropped by parachute. He had come out of it all seriously wounded. Wenzlow had given him up for lost and had mourned him like a son.

Now Fahrenberg wanted to come back to Wenzlow again. That was not difficult. The adjutant who had replaced him did not mind being transferred. Wenzlow listened to the plans which were already well developed. He guessed that, like himself, Fahrenberg took no pleasure in the thought of spending his leave at home. The muscles in Wenzlow's cheeks twitched when he even so much as thought of what awaited him at home. It would be a wasteland of questions; he would be obliged to tell them something about the winter merely to satisfy his family's pride and curiosity. The orderly brought in the breakfast and the two officers fell to with great enthusiasm after having been so long without regular meals.

'We've had some news at last,' said Fahrenberg. 'The night before last Krause came back. The company is wiped out.'

Wenzlow raised questioning eyebrows. As he lay wounded, Fahrenberg had tried to arrange for food to be dropped by plane to the besieged troops, at least until reinforcements could be brought up to relieve them. Not till much later, when he lay in the hospital, did he learn from some of his comrades who had managed to get away just what had happened. Even if guns and provisions were dropped to the troops, they would scarcely be enough to keep the company going till they were rescued. If the situation changed even slightly for the worse, there would be nothing for them but to surrender without a fight. Planes had been flown over their position not to give them help but to liquidate them before they surrendered voluntarily. Gradually, and not till he began to recover, did Fahrenberg grasp the situation – his friend Erbenbeck was among the officers in the liquidated company. It was only a few days ago that he had actually been well enough to understand. He was in despair and his apathetic despair could find expression only in outward activity. For outwardly there were reasons, visible signs, one could hold on to. He had had intermittent, stolen conversations with his friend. It was quite possible that Erbenbeck had been the one to urge surrender without a fight. Fahrenberg recalled similar signs and inclinations on the part of the dead man. He himself had fought through, wounded as he was; he had surmounted all dangers, all suffering and his dead friend had let him down. Erbenbeck thought suffering was senseless. He wanted to make an end of things; and

suddenly he came up against the principle that an officer must never surrender. Dying, he mocked his friend's efforts to worm his way through the enemy encirclement.

Wenzlow sat staring straight before him.

'It was not very pleasant,' Fahrenberg said.

Wenzlow nodded.

'We must take advantage of this pause to disinfect our troops here thoroughly,' Fahrenberg said. 'We don't dare carry any bacilli along with us. We can't bomb individual points of infection from airplanes. We'll have to make blood tests individually, man for man.'

Wenzlow nodded a second time. One or two years ago Fahrenberg had come out hesitantly with his doubts, but now he had sacrificed himself so much that he demanded the same amount of suffering from his comrades. The stronger the enemy, the greater the sacrifice. His people were surrounded by enemies. He had long ago given up asking why. He was wounded and he had suffered. And he wanted others to be wounded as he had been and to suffer as he had. To Wenzlow his young guest was a symbol of youth and all the harshness that belongs to youth. He understood the conclusion Fahrenberg had reached.

He asked Fahrenberg for news from home. A shadow flitted across the young man's face. His parents in Cologne had been bombed out; his father believed that the only weapon with which to combat the air-raid terror was cool determination. But the shadow on young Fahrenberg's face was due to another reason: the girl he was engaged to had written to him that she realized their engagement was a mistake. So this girl, too, whom he had believed to be loyal and steadfast, found marriage with an aviator more attractive than with him. He inquired about Wenzlow's family. Wenzlow told him, smiling, that his old aunt in Potsdam was still hoping he might run into his nephew some day. She pictured the Ukraine as something like a walk around the Jungfersee.

Though Wenzlow was amused at what he considered foolish nonsense on the part of an ignorant old woman, he was soon to see that she had not been far wrong.

Much to his delight, Lieutenant-General Brauns invited him to go on a tour of inspection which was to end in a conference of the armed forces. Wenzlow was still given to over-sensitiveness and to imagining that he was being overlooked by his superior officer. This invitation, however, showed him that Brauns had further plans for him. After the inspection tour they drove to the conference. There

Wenzlow unexpectedly ran into his nephew, Helmut von Klemm.

'Not really! Uncle Fritz! I saw your name on the register. There aren't two Fritz von Wenzlows in the world.'

Helmut called on his uncle after the conference, bringing with him a wine from the Crimea, said to be of rare vintage, some vodka and something to eat. He was still as erect and bright-eyed as he had been as a boy and when he laughed he looked as if he could gobble up the whole of life like a ripe apple. Many years ago his family had agreed that it was as well to have this Helmut in his Hitler Youth uniform present at the conversations, perhaps not always entirely flattering to the Party in power, that went on in their house in Potsdam. Now out here in bombed-out L. it was quite useful to Wenzlow to run into this nephew, a young S.S. officer in such excellent standing. Helmut good-naturedly filled the glasses, and drank toasts with his uncle. He had become a strikingly handsome young man. Those beautiful features, however, showed no signs of any increase of character; if anything, Wenzlow thought the boy's face had lost something.

'Youth, youth,' thought Wenzlow. 'They soon lose it out here at the front.' In the old days the boy had always had a certain half shy, half enraptured expression, and a strong desire to understand what his adored uncle thought about every subject. It was not strange that Helmut should no longer be eager for Wenzlow's opinion, nor that he should drink faster and more than his uncle and keep drinking toasts to all sorts of people. As he talked, he leapt to his feet, and paced to and fro. But there was nothing strange about that either. They were alone. Outside the moonlight was so bright you could count the leaves on the trees.

The boy stood at the window and looked out into the night.

'Moonlight,' he said, 'makes nature look so - so spineless. The sun rouses a desire for action in men - the moon, emotions.'

'Yes, that's true,' said Wenzlow, smiling. 'Perhaps that's why the sun is masculine in French: *le soleil*. The moon, *la lune*, feminine.'

Helmut turned back toward the table, and began drinking again and talking.

'It was a real sacrifice for me when I was ordered here from France,' he said. Wenzlow was pleased and amazed at the frank way the boy talked - undoubtedly the results of the vodka. 'That time they thought they could get along without occupying the whole of France. So I was needed here more than there. Now I've been so well settled here and for so long, that I've become irreplaceable.'

Wenzlow smiled and looked at the tall, handsome youth who had

become irreplaceable. He had gone back to the window and was now leaning against it, a glass in his hand.

Helmut mentioned the excellent view from the house in which the officers were billeted. You looked out over the courtyard of the commander's residence and away over the court to a hospital garden. From this he went on to speak of the army hospital and the scientists and equipment they had at their disposal, equipment of which the Charité in Berlin would be downright jealous. They made all sorts of tests with inoculations and injections for which they had never had material at their disposal before, for instance, grafting living organs on wounded men. In the old days they had a couple of rabbits or dogs to work on; sometimes, if lucky, a monkey. He told his uncle about a friend who had been seriously wounded and how they had patched him up – 'three Ukrainers had to suffer the consequences. For once in their lives they were some use.'

Wenzlow looked up. 'How do you mean suffer the consequences?' he asked.

'Well, do you think they went walking around cheerfully after that? They just dug a couple of vital organs out of them, otherwise my friend wouldn't be fit to live now.'

'What did they do with them then?'

'Do? They didn't have to do anything more. Those who are too tough are sent over to the camp. It isn't far off. But it takes a little petrol for the trip.' He hesitated.

Wenzlow understood at once the meaning of that momentary silence. Either: 'Do you come under the heading "sentimental old man", Uncle?' or 'Have I been drinking too much and given away something I shouldn't have said?'

To put him at his ease Wenzlow said quickly: 'Oh yes, of course!'

'We're no Salvation Army: we don't hand out free soup and rations. I told Major Betz when he came to me whining about not having enough rations for his prisoner transport and that when they opened the cars a couple of them had croaked on the way – I just told him: "Well, would you rather have a couple of German children croak? Back at home the fellows are eating our markets empty. Since they can't work any more and still have to eat it's just the same as if we sent swarms of locusts into our starving country."' He talked violently, though Wenzlow had made no remark. This Major Betz had obviously felt as uncomfortable as if the stomach were the seat of conscience and were beginning to retch. Suddenly Wenzlow heard his own words of long, long ago as if he were listening to his double. 'When I am abroad and see pictures of our Hitler Youth in

newspapers and magazines, I have always thought: I wonder if Helmut is that boy there?’

Helmut went on in a lively tone:

‘By the way, Uncle, that comrade of mine who had a couple of Ukrainian spare parts put in him, talks to me day and night – about guess whom?’

‘I haven’t the least idea, Helmut.’

‘Your daughter, Marianne. She’s grown up to be a stunning girl, We saw her when we went through on leave.’

Then he began to talk of Wenzlow’s family, of his last leave, and of his love affairs. That was all quite normal too – even when he asked his uncle confidentially to give him some pointers about women. He had had a few opportunities here that were certainly all right and he wouldn’t be running any risks. Wenzlow shook his head and smiled. That was all fairly normal after all. He had often heard wounded men he visited talking quite sensibly about ordinary matters for minutes at a time and then suddenly, when their fever rose, babble such terrible stuff that it made you shudder. Now the fever had abated, so the boy talked about sensible things: charming Marianne, the moonlight on the hospital garden. Helmut talked incessantly, like all boys of his age. ‘How strange the shadow looks in the moonlight’. . . ‘And the charred oak tree over there, as if it had been struck by the Blitz’. . . ‘It’s a wonder we don’t get a visit from planes on a night like this.’ Then, all of a sudden, his temperature went up. ‘We had a lot of work here when they chose L. of all places for your conferences.’ The sound of his voice indicated that the fever was rising. ‘We cleaned out the place in no time and got rid of everyone who had no special business here. In fact we didn’t have time to make our usual choice. We didn’t even have time to send a load of workers back home. We shipped them all as quickly as we could to B. They’ll have to look a little sharp there. We’ve made sure of it this time. They’ve got food for only a couple of thousand . . . that speeds up certain measures, as you know.’

Wenzlow made an effort to control himself. He would have liked to get up and go away, just as one gets up and goes away from a sick-bed where the patient is twisting and turning and raving in horrible nightmares. Helmut looked at him sharply, as if he suspected his uncle’s thoughts. Wenzlow suppressed a question he had on his lips, for, contrary to what happens at a sick-bed, the fever patient here had the power to press a button and rid himself of his troublesome visitor and the latter’s annoying inquiries.

However, Helmut had noticed that Wenzlow had not said a

word – neither in agreement or disagreement. Suddenly he went up close to him. He even shoved in between the chair and the table to look his uncle in the eye.

'Let me just tell you something before I go, my dear fellow. You think, perhaps, I don't know what's in your mind now. But I do know. Now let me ask you once more: you heard on the radio enough about the air-raided terror in Cologne and so forth. And then you thought: outrageous a whole city and women and children . . . didn't you? But that raid was only the beginning, a mere foretaste and it will go on and on if we don't win quickly. I don't know whether it's pleasanter to croak by being blown to bits or to be liquidated by an electric current or by turning on the gas. But you probably don't even want us to win; it's nothing to you!' He glared at the older man. Under those cold hard young eyes, Wenzlow had the horrible feeling: 'He hasn't any fever at all; I'll probably come to the same conclusions as he. Our temperatures are exactly the same. He is just as healthy as I am or I am just as sick as he.' Aloud he said forcefully:

'What do you mean by asking me such a question?'

The younger man said: 'That's the boy!'

To change the subject Wenzlow asked for news of his sister, Lenore, Helmut's mother.

'She's working in a hospital; she did something like that in the first world war, I think.' He added coolly: 'Had some difficulties, I believe, at first, on account of her advanced age. Now, of course, we need them all.'

The fever had dropped again; he spoke coldly and in his usual tone. One might almost say his temperature was subnormal. 'How strange,' thought Wenzlow, 'this boy, glowing with youth, has something of an old man about him, not just because he has so much power, not just because he could simply press a button when it suits him and get rid of me. His handsome young face undoubtedly attracts women. But it is already marked with signs of a long life, hard living, knowledge of all dangers, all crimes.'

Wenzlow was relieved when his orderly knocked and reported that they were to leave in ten minutes.

He returned from L. late in the afternoon. Ordinarily it would have been a relief to him to see Fahrenberg after those difficult hours with his nephew. But this time they were too busy to find an opportunity to talk. Wenzlow did not sleep that night. He reproached himself for not having talked frankly with the boy who

was, after all, his sister's son. The fears that had prevented him from doing so now seemed exaggerated. But suppose he had been right about them? What then? He saw his Tante Amalie's cold blue eyes turned on him reproachfully: 'You weren't thrown together with him for nothing. Now you have let the opportunity slip.' He excused himself: 'But, dear Auntie, it would have been no use at all.'

'That's what you think,' retorted Tante Amalie. 'You also thought it was impossible for you two to meet out there. I knew at once that you would.'

In the last weeks he had become silent and thoughtful. In the morning when he was shaving he noticed that his hair was turning grey, his cheeks were sunken, and his lips thin from so much pressing them together in a constant effort to hold back words. His eyes were the same hard blue as Tante Amalie's; in particular his whole profile was like hers, the profile of which the old lady was so proud.

But the things that had happened to him so far had been the accidents of war that come to all. The blow fate was reserving for him personally was still to come. A letter from home! How strange, this time only the little girl has written! Not a word from his wife.

'Dear Father, I'm writing this because Mother is in bed and much too weak to write herself. She still cannot realize the tragedy that has struck us: our beloved little brother is dead. During an air-raid we had sent the children into the back cellar because it seemed safest there. Also the two sons of Hauptmann Franzen who lives in our house. And Frau von Rawitz with her baby, and the superintendent's children. But the bomb struck the highroad and carried away the rear wall. Now Mother reproaches herself for not having kept the boy with us older ones. It would be much better, the doctor says, if she would have a good cry. Her health is very bad. But the doctor thinks she will get over it. Dear Father, we must be brave; he was pretty young, but he died like a man on the field of honour too. Dear Father, I am so sad that I have to write you such bad news. It would do Mother good if you would soon write her a nice letter from the front telling her that we must all look death in the face . . . you know what to say. With a big hug and kiss,

'Your devoted daughter,

'Marianne.'

Wenzlow wrote the letter: he comforted his wife as his daughter had dictated by reminding her of the terrific sacrifices the Fatherland demanded from each of them today. Though later as he lay alone at night he himself found no comfort in this thought. He had

been proud of his boy: the one on which the future of his family rested. His daughters would give birth to sons with strange names; his son was dead – there was nothing left on which to base their hopes.

He mentioned the matter to Fahrenberg casually one day. And he would not have felt any need to give vent to his feelings then had he not, like all men in his position, been oppressed by the tension that precedes an offensive. Fahrenberg explained the measures that were supposed to clear the hinterland for the long-awaited offensive. Most of the population would be sifted and transported in various directions. The village was bursting with military. Every face, every motion, betrayed the same tension. The trees on the square had been cut down long ago; the flock of birds still kept swooping down on the same spot as if they had not noticed that now the shadow fell there from a gun battery instead of from a maple tree. Soldiers lay about in the school. Those children who were strong had been picked for work in the fields. As to those not fit for work – Fahrenberg made a gesture in the direction of Camp L. He said, though Wenzlow had not asked:

‘Stalin long ago declared guerrilla warfare was legal. We therefore make no distinction between civilians and army.’

Wenzlow listened quietly to him, just as Brauns listened to his own reports, with a glance at once steady and indifferent. The two men felt as close to each other again as they had in past years. Their understanding was just as strong as before. They were both bitter when, because of disputes over jurisdiction, several measures connected with clearing up their district had not been carried out quickly enough. The actual carrying out of the measures was not within their province. They controlled the ‘when’, not the ‘how’. Some time before, Wenzlow had mentioned briefly that he had met a relative on his last inspection tour. The unpleasantness of the moonlight night he had spent with his nephew had long since been forgotten. Like everyone else in the place, he needed his whole strength now for the expected push. If one of the two men had expressed a doubt, it might have undermined the morale of the other. They spoke only of the conviction that the blow now planned must be successful at all costs; they expected no other echo. Their spirits were drained as empty as the countryside in which they stood. They felt no conflict between their orders and their consciences. They did not hesitate. Wenzlow saw from the tense, convulsed manner in which Fahrenberg held himself that the younger man was still suffering from his wound.

Wilhelm had been dead over a year when one Sunday, Christian, out walking with his dog, met Liese and her daughter. He did something he had not done for a long time; he walked home with her from church. Liese had often wondered why he still avoided her, though in her opinion there was now no reason for it. The truth was he had lost his desire for her. Just as her youngest boy had grown, so she too had grown – but in breadth; her legs that had once tripped about on round neat little bones now looked like columns. But her bright ice-blue eyes and her yellow-brown freckles were the same. Christian had not changed much: he hobbled rather more than before and his hair in many places was faded or streaked with grey. When Liese thought of Christian – and why shouldn't she think of him? – she could not conceive that he could ever forget anything that had really meant much to him. He was the sort of a man who always came back to the thing he had cared for. Though he never seemed to get excited about anything, he was fundamentally loyal.

But when he asked her to send her daughter out of the room, she knew at once what had brought him here today. Her face took on as serious an expression as his. She had a lot of little crow's feet, but her sharp blue eyes were clear. Neither grief nor shame had troubled them. Nor had the tiny point of pertness and shrewdness that started in the corners of her eyes when she laughed faded in these twenty-five years. Neither time nor work, love nor marriage, had left any mark on those eyes. She pressed her lips tight together and crossed her arms over her black dress when Christian, very formal in a new clean collar, came out with his offer of marriage.

He proposed according to the village custom and as if he were getting one of the few things done that are worth doing. He was even a little embarrassed. When the dog under the table looked up at him with his bright eyes Christian quickly got himself under control. He suggested that Liese should move into the shack with him; it would save her the long walk to the fields. Her daughter, a war bride, could live in the house in the village. This would also keep her from making trouble about her mother's new marriage. Liese brought out the same cherry Schnapps she had always offered the pastor: they clinked glasses and the matter was settled.

In this chaotic world in which it was difficult to keep one's five senses and bones together, the right moment had come at last for the two of them. Christian whistled to his dog and hobbled off. Liese watched him through the kitchen window.

'Now see, Widu,' said Christian, 'we finally pulled that off, too.'

But things did not go as quickly and as simply as he hoped that Sunday. Shortly afterwards Liese learned that her eldest son had been killed in battle. She came weeping with the news to Christian's workshop. He listened for a while to her overpowering grief that ended in self-denunciation and reproaches.

'It shouldn't be. We thought it was too easy. Now we have to pay for it. It couldn't have turned out well: it wouldn't have been the right punishment for our secret sin. That would go against everything we know to be right.'

Christian suddenly flew into a rage: 'What nonsense are you talking about? God has other sins to punish nowadays. He doesn't give a damn about the little one we committed. He's got very different things to worry about these days.'

He agreed to postpone the wedding for a while. When he was alone again with his dog, he said to Widu:

'Now you can see what we're getting into! And we'll always have to be thinking up some new trick. How I wore myself out trying to get something for my boy! To keep the big fellow from putting something over on him. We're always worrying about things like that, inheritance and the future and all such stuff, and there you see, it was all unnecessary! Now all we need is for the little fellow to come back. But we can't do much about that either. If we could only get out of the habit of imagining we could do much about anything!'

VI

After a brief sojourn in Berlin, Lieven was ordered to Prague and so escaped the period he had secretly dreaded: his wife's last month of pregnancy and the birth of his child. Now, at long intervals, he paid brief and infrequent visits to his apartment on the Kurfürstendamm which Elisabeth still occupied. On his first visit from Czechoslovakia his son lay fat and healthy in his cradle. Elisabeth still had milk in her breasts, which seemed very strange to Lieven.

'Well what did you expect from my breast? Vodka?'

She was as charming as ever, but he was curiously annoyed that, in his absence, his son had been christened Otto after her dead brother. However, Elisabeth merely laughed and said it was quite all right. It hurt neither the child, nor Lieven, nor his career. She was still as gentle and ironical as he was used to seeing her in the old days. Each time he came home he measured the passing of time by the growth of his little son. When Lieven came to Berlin the second

time, the child could stand alone on his feet and there was no doubt about his resemblance to his father. On this trip Lieven was ordered by special command to Finland where, with a group of S.S. officers, he was to give the Finnish officers who were friendly to Germany the advantage of former experiences in occupied territory in preparation for occupations to come. This time Elisabeth was her old self again. Her figure was as slender as before – he could almost make his two hands meet around her hips – and she had not the slightest suspicion of milk in her firm little breasts.

‘It’s hard to believe,’ he said, ‘that you carried that big boy about inside you for some time, Elisabeth.’

‘Yes, it really is,’ said Elisabeth. ‘It’s what our landlady, Haber, calls one of the wonders of nature.’

He brought his old friend Luettgens up; he had run into him in Prague. They were going to Finland together. Luettgens was no longer ‘little Luettgens’ in rank, but he still was in size and he hated it. The slightness of his build made him unfit to serve in the same arm of the service as his friend Lieven. He was given a post in administration, a job that frequently brought them together. Elisabeth listened in amusement to his stories. There had been a regular fight between their office and the secret Red office. Each office had hastily put their specialists on to studying the question of the particular kind of sabotage that would cut down the effect of projectiles. They had then turned over to the controllers in the factory an exact description of all imaginable kinds of sabotage – and not a second too soon. The Czech saboteurs had, at almost the same moment, introduced every known method among the personnel. Exactly as the specialists had foreseen! Specialists often hard to approach! Frequently by fast, sharp work with the city directory they had discovered just who had certain knowledge and where they could get it. For instance, an apparently harmless old music-teacher! You never would have suspected from his violin-playing that he was really a chemist. There were a lot of people like that. If they had not interfered recently, just before the change of a shift, the whole factory would have gone up. Did Lieven still have the parting gift his landlady in Steglitz gave him, the swastika pillow? They roared with laughter over this memory. Lieven had comforted Luettgens that time by assuring him that the swastika would certainly not stop with embroidered symbols. They left at night. Luettgens was taking valuable information to their Finnish friends. Elisabeth wrapped her child up warmly and put him to bed.

The war with Russia had already been going on for some time.

Then Lieven came on leave for the third time. The days rushed by so quickly that time seemed to stand still, like a wheel that turns so fast you can't see it move. Elisabeth was less interested in the fruitless siege of Leningrad than in her son's weight, the number of his teeth and the few words he had learned to speak.

When Lieven suddenly appeared at the door of their flat one night, Elisabeth ran to him and kissed him, while Haber, their landlady, looked on and wept. Later in their bedroom Elisabeth said:

'Sit down and have a drink. I think we've done enough to impress Haber. Just what she imagines a surprise leave should be.'

'You were surprised yourself.'

'Of course,' she said. 'I've always expected you to come home some night and surprise me. Now you have come and surprised me at night.' She was wearing a flimsy, greenish-grey *négligé* - he thought she looked very alluring.

'Again I had almost forgotten how wonderful you look,' he said.

'I always know how well you look,' she said. 'You are still just as handsome.'

He put his arm round her shoulder. She drew back a little, then immediately did what was expected of her; drew him to her and kissed him. She leaned over the child's bed with him. Lieven had long ago got used to his son's presence. Now he looked down at the baby, not with a frown, but smiling.

'He already looks like a little boy. I have not changed so far as I know. You are as charming as ever. The only one of us who has changed is that little fellow there.'

'Come, Ernst, let's have a drink.'

She brought two Schnapps glasses and kept her eyes on the table as she poured out the drinks. Lieven went on:

'The only thing about him that bothers me is his name. I'll think of something else to call him; not always Otto, Otto, Otto.'

'After all you were very good friends once,' said Elisabeth, 'you and my brother.' She pushed his glass towards him. The shadow on her face was not deep enough to belie the casualness of her words. 'Let's drink to your arrival and to the child's future.' She emptied her own glass at one gulp.

'And also to something nice: to your homecoming!'

She looked up at him, tense, waiting. He took her hand: 'You understand,' he said, 'it's come at last. That's why I came back this time. To take you and the child home. Everything is settled now, everything you have longed for. You can go back to the estate, do you understand?'

The shock was even greater than he had expected. She spilled her drink. Instead of wiping away the drops she traced a damp circle around the glass with her forefinger. Lieven went on: 'As I've already written to you, our landlord belongs to one of the first families who were allowed to go back to Riga. Since his return he has looked after our affairs like his own. He writes that the main building at least is already under repair. The Germans have given back to the estate the various parcels of land that were divided among the peasants under the Bolsheviks. Now the whole crew from the lake village and the adjacent village has to work under the direction of our soldiers at restoring the place. How long will it take you go get ready for the journey?'

'We can go at once if you wish,' said Elisabeth. After the words 'We're going home' she had not listened to anything he was saying. She clinked glasses with him, took a sip and said: 'Just let me go quickly and tell the baby.'

Lieven laughed: 'He can't have learned so much since my last leave that he could understand that.'

She said in complete earnestness, without a trace of mockery:

'He was nearer to my heart than the rest of you. So he knows best.'

Lieven watched her go through the half-open door. He thought: 'At last something has touched her! That went damned deep with her!'

She came back and sat down beside him. Her face was calm. 'I'm glad that at least one Lieven with the name of Otto can go back,' she said.

'If it had been up to your brother, Elisabeth,' Lieven replied, 'we would never have gone back, never! If we had listened to that apostle and dreamer. To take what belongs to you you have to have guns. Your poor brother raved about Bismarck and Schlageter and Jesus Christ, one after the other. That's not the way things go. It only happens the way the landlord wrote: the whole bunch up there who have been stuffing their bellies full on our estate must be made to belch up what they've eaten, and to till and plough the land they have spoiled. That's the only way to get back what was yours. The only way for you to go home.'

'I shan't keep you waiting,' Elisabeth said. 'If you don't want to leave tonight, then as far as I'm concerned, tomorrow.'

He laughed. 'Not quite so fast. I still have a couple of things to attend to here in Berlin. Get everything ready. See that you wrap the boy up good and warm.'

She did not sleep the last night before her return home. She sat beside the lamp with a glass of Schnapps and some knitting. 'Our landlady, Haber,' she told Lieven, 'has got me out of the habit of smoking and has taught me to knit strange patterns of woollen sweaters, enough for generations to come – till Judgment Day!' The child slept soundly. And Lieven slept just as soundly on her bed. She thought: 'The journey home is no event for him. It isn't even a homecoming for him. It's all one to him where he sleeps. The stranger the place the better. But all the same he is taking me home. He has kept his promise. He deserves a whole lot of nice things. And when I'm once settled up there with my child near my woods and my lake and my clouds, everything will be all right.'

Since the deaths of her mother and brother she had never wanted people. She had wanted only to go home. She believed firmly that everything would be all right the moment the old walls closed around her.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the siren – air-raid alarm. She ran to her child's bed and quickly wrapped the boy in the blankets she had ready for the journey. She thought: 'Who knows, perhaps we won't go after all.'

She kept close to Lieven as he carried the child down the stairs. He did it skilfully and lightly as he did everything.

Down below the cellar was stuffy and crowded. The air-raid warden was directing the crowd in a tone he fancied was very military. His orders and his soothing words struck a new note in the pause between the last siren and the first bomb. Elisabeth covered the child's head with her coat. People crowded together freezing and sweating as if they were cooped up in a railway compartment and all going to the same place. To Elisabeth it seemed like a journey in the compartment of a train headed at top speed for the next world. Sirens, flak, devilish signals in hellish railway stations! When the bomb burst she thought, the train has jumped the rails! But every time the shrewd, mad engineer managed to take the curve again; the train rolled on at furious speed as if it had to get to its destination unharmed.

There was a lull in which the signals warned that the danger was not over. Everyone drew a long breath. Elisabeth listened to the various comments around her – just as on a journey, too brief for friendships or enmities. She thought: 'I have my child with me: nothing else matters.' Once she looked over at her landlady, Haber, with her uncombed, matted hair.

'If that bunch thinks,' said Haber, 'that they're frightening us

with this sort of thing!' At which many in the crowd hastened to agree with her in voices unnaturally high-pitched from tension. A little child kept crying continually. The mother tried to hush it as if she were ashamed not to have given birth to a braver child. She was the wife of the major from the fourth floor who looked frowning from one person to the other. A young girl laughed hysterically and could not be quieted.

'It's not bad either, at your home,' said someone.

'Well, just think, that is Lieven,' thought Elisabeth. 'He is here too.' And it occurred to her, incidentally, that he had once played a part in her life. She had a wild desire to take her child and run out of the dark stuffy compartment. When the second bomb fell she thought: 'What's the use of keeping the house clean. The villagers throw up trenches in the fields – to no purpose. They're guarded by German soldiers – to no purpose.' The baby now began to cry.

'What is there to cry about, my boy? We are there now.'

'Elisabeth?' asked Lieven.

'Yes.'

'Are you both all right?'

'I think so, fairly so.'

At last they were allowed to go. The day was young and fresh. This was not the other world, the last station, but the old familiar street, unchanged except that the house on the corner was missing. The whole quarter had been roped off. They were moved temporarily into a garden house in the neighbourhood. Hitler Youth came round handing out milk to the children. Elisabeth obtained her ration. She fed the weeping baby and put it to bed. Lieven received permission to bring down their luggage from the house as well as many earthly and extremely familiar possessions. Elisabeth thought: 'So we are going today after all.' All around her she heard the usual outbursts of fear, of scorn and hatred. She even ran into Haber again – the woman had round red spots on both cheeks. So she had not landed in the other world either; there was nothing of the angel about her; she was swearing in more earthly language than usual. She cursed the evil powers of the world with which she had come in all too close contact a few hours before, calling them by the usual names – Stalin and Churchill, Roosevelt and Israel.

Some hours later Elisabeth sat with her child in the express train. This train had no ghostly engineer: it even boasted a dining-car, because it was the army staff train. Everyone cursed the Britishers' ridiculous lust for revenge. 'We'll see who can hold out longest!' The child spent the night in the sleeping-compartment. In the dining-

car, the Lievens met two couples they had known in the army. The husband of one of the two couples was Retzlow, who had once been a great admirer of Elisabeth's. He compared her secretly with his shy little wife. Lieven was proud of his wife. With her haughty carriage and her lively wit she was always the centre of attention. The train halted just beyond Berlin in front of a branch line. A couple of tracks beyond, they saw a crowd round a coach. Retzlow said: 'That's a Jewish transport.' They all peered curiously out of the window. S.A. men were shoving women and children, old and young, at tremendous speed into a cattle truck.

'What are they going to do with them?' asked Elisabeth.

'They're taking them to Poland. Then they'll be out of our way here.'

Shy little Frau von Retzlow said: 'That's where they belong.'

Elisabeth followed with her eyes a pregnant woman who was being squeezed in the cattle car. Her companions were trying to help her in spite of the crowd. Someone leaned down from the open door and someone else lifted her from behind into the truck. Elisabeth asked:

'Do they give them anything to eat?'

'Not as much fat as they're used to,' Retzlow said.

The husband of the other married woman, who wore his thin hair combed in careful strands across his bald head, said:

'We haven't too much ourselves.'

'Ernst, did you see the woman?' asked Elisabeth.

'Why?'

'Suppose she has her child, now, in the train.'

'There are so many Jewish doctors, one of them will be sure to be around.' Her question, and his friends' surprised glances, annoyed him. She noticed it and quickly changed the conversation:

'This is actually real Chinese tea.'

'From Japan, *Gnädige Frau*.'

She stirred the sugar. The waiter brought toast. He asked them all courteously for bread cards, as if he were begging their pardon for his lack of generosity. 'When we have enough, we give them something to eat,' thought Elisabeth. 'Better to think of nothing but that we will soon be home. Better to think ahead, never to look back. Not to think of the flights from home, of the first flight years ago, of the second, when we were almost settled there again, nor of last night and the wild journey, with the crashing signals and the mad engineer, nor of that Jewish transport a few moments ago: that is already part of the past too.'

She paid little attention to the reception the board of management had arranged. There were garlands of flowers and flags and even music. There was an S.S. division from the country. To her the reception was only something that kept her from entering the house at once. Every breath she drew had the smell of her woods, her sea, the most beautiful thing she had known since childhood. Not even the wild surly glances of eyes staring over at them from the village could pollute the air. Gaily, leading her healthy child, now wide awake, by the hand, Elisabeth walked ahead of them all through the main entrance: the pillars, once damaged, had been cemented together and whitewashed for her reception. Someone handed her salt and bread according to an ancient custom.

Lieven promised to engage German servants on his next trip to Berlin. When she awoke in the morning and looked out of the window over the land, when the wind was in the right direction and she could smell the sea, she was almost happy. She was never depressed at being alone, not even when Lieven went back to the front. His leaves were almost always an interruption, with a crowd of friends, parties and noise.

She was surprised and a little amused when she was warned not to go to the village alone. What could those people have against her in particular? She had never harmed anyone. The brief Soviet occupation had changed the people from the ground up. It had made rowdies and brigands out of the most law-abiding persons. The worst of the lot had already been taken away – the authorities had seen to that. On the farm she missed the old faces. Only an old housekeeper came back to them. And little by little, she told her mistress stories about daughters and grandchildren who had suddenly deserted their parents under cover of night.

Seventeen

I

ELISABETH HAD NOW attained her desire, the thing she had longed for all these years – to bring up her child on their own soil. The setting sun slanting over the sea, the cry of birds, the taste of wild berries – all reminded her constantly that here she was at home. She had been driven and pushed from one frontier to an-

other, from one love affair to another. In her dreams, home had seemed to her the only place on earth where there was peace. The peace that streamed from the familiar soil was so great she felt nothing could ever disturb her, not even the distant thunder of guns or single shots or sirens, warning the city of bombardments. She had surrounded herself with a sort of artificial screen through which only the things of home dear to her childhood could penetrate: things like whispering grasses and wind and the gay-coloured skirts of the peasant women.

Even the talk of friends who often sat about in summer in the inner court and in the great hall made little impression on her. When they came in upset and excited, when they assailed her ears with news of the Russian advance, the re-taking of Charkow, the Allied victory in Tunis, even then she felt that all those outbursts of hatred and rage did not even touch the peaceful calm that reigned in her home.

Retzlow was always delighted to come for a visit – on leave from his shy little wife. Elisabeth seemed to him more beautiful and younger than ever. She had not the slightest trace of shyness, and no longer even any traces of irony. He carved a pipe for the little boy, just to be able to sit a little longer with the boy's mother. Friends had returned to the city. They were excited and uneasy over news from the front. A push forward from Orel with an enormous number of tanks, on which they had set the highest hopes, had obviously come to a halt. Retzlow said:

'In our anxiety a home like this is an island of rest.'

'Indeed, yes,' Elisabeth said.

He looked at her a little surprised.

In a moment or two she added: 'I shall certainly never leave here a third time.'

'This time I could scarcely undertake to protect you. In case there is ever a question of leaving, you must get away in time.'

She laughed and said: 'I shall never go away from here again. I would rather be buried up here than be walking around alive in your cities.'

'That's the sort of answer we'd like to hear from all our estate-owners and settlers. But what about the child?'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'A child is always safest with his mother. I shall never part with him either. What has got into you, Retzlow? Just because things up there and things farther south aren't going quite the way they should go!' She ran her hand through her boy's thick hair. The little fellow

was trying to smoke his wooden pipe. He was a handsome, happy boy, perhaps a trifle too gentle. Suddenly her mood changed – this was something Retzlow always liked about her – from deep earnestness to lightness.

‘Perhaps you know the story, Retzlow, about the devil who made love to an innocent young girl. And when her child was born, God allowed him to inherit only the good qualities of his father. The child was handsome and brave and clever.’

‘It was now Retzlow’s turn to laugh:

‘That’s a new one to me, but charming. But who is the devil in this case and who the innocent maiden?’

They both laughed. He drove back to his home in the best of spirits.

She was glad when she could have a number of days to herself. Soldiers were quartered in the adjacent building of the estate. It was necessary, they said, to protect the family and estate from surprise attacks for which, just as in olden times, one must now be prepared. Of course they would gradually wipe out those gangs still hanging out in the woods – even though the army did not think they were important, gangs like that could always pull off a number of bold and useless raids. The uncertainty did not bother Elisabeth; it only made being at home all the more exciting. Her brother, who had always been fond of such stories, had sometimes told her how the women of their family had lived in bygone days. The men had had to guard at the point of the gun the rearing of their children and the ploughing of their fields.

The motorized army rolling past on the highway, the village folk going to work in the fields with surly faces, all seemed to touch only the outer walls of the estate. On the estate itself the air was as clear and pure as if it had been sifted of curses and complaints.

Ernst Lieven was detached from his regiment for a number of weeks. Part of his job was to organize the Lithuanian S.S. Sometimes he would come home unexpectedly and bring with him a crowd of friends. Since his youth he had been one of those people who, regardless of rank, instantly become the centre of attention wherever they happen to be. It had been so in the first World War, in the Freikorps, at the estate in Upper Silesia. Then, however, he had been the recipient of hospitality; now he offered others hospitality on his own estate. He was no longer the sole point of interest: he was proud of his beautiful wife and his son. His fear of parenthood, about which Elisabeth had once twitted him, had long since vanished.

‘Those Nazis are right,’ he said, ‘when they keep insisting on

having children. Look at us! We need sons to hold our land together for us.'

Elisabeth laughed, but only from her throat, the way she used to laugh; her eyes were hard.

'Yes, those Nazis are right. You talk as if you weren't wearing an S.S. uniform.'

He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. He noticed with satisfaction that Retzlow was paying court to her as before and, just as before, with no success. Elisabeth did not seem to care anything about him. She did not care about anyone.

In the long run she bored him a little. He liked best of all to sit at home with as many of his brother officers as possible. In the next room Elisabeth made tea for them, the child clung to her skirts. She heard Retzlow's voice through the half-open door:

'I really can't understand those fellows. To me such a sight would be an incentive to enter a monastery. If I were a monk, I would send all monks to the camp and make them look at a sight like that before they took their vows of chastity. That would rid them of any desire for the rest of their lives.'

The officers roared with laughter. Ernst Lieven said:

'That's right! I've never seen so many ugly specimens at one time; what stomachs! what breasts!'

'I once had an affair with a Jewish girl,' Retzlow said. 'Of course, I mean, long ago, before we were race-conscious. I wonder whether they have really dug up the dregs now or whether my eyes are open for the first time.'

'I never cared much for them,' said Lieven, 'at least what you could see. But such a collection of horrors can't be an accident. There were at least two thousand of them walking past us stark naked.'

Someone else said - Elisabeth recognized Schulze's voice:

'After all, they knew what was in store for them; it wasn't any bridal procession, I can tell you. No girl looks attractive on that sort of a walk.'

'Nonsense,' that was Retzlow's voice again, 'I'm not talking about their faces. I'm talking about stomachs and breasts. They don't swell up in fear of death.'

Elisabeth set out the cups for tea. She pushed the boy harshly from her when he leaned against her. He looked up at her in surprise. Carrying the tea-tray, she went into the big hall. She was embarrassed as she walked the few steps to the table. 'This is no bridal procession either,' she thought. She had often heard them talking about the camp: casually and secretly, even at the last

quite openly. Ernst Lieven had once told her in reply to her question:

'You ought to see our children in Berlin, the queues before the shops, the rush at the markets. We have taken an oath: our children shall not freeze and starve, come what may. You yourself wouldn't feed a strange child and let your own go hungry. We have never pretended to be a Salvation Army. They proudly feed two dozen children in a large city although two thousand are dying at that very moment. We figure it out clearly: so and so many must live, so and so many die.'

She had not known what to say in reply. Now for the first time she thought: 'There is no such choice and there should not be any. Such things happen only in old tales when the devil used to demand - your child or your soul.' For almost a year she had been hearing reports like this by accident, here and there, as a deaf person listens to others talking. Now and then a loud word strikes his ear; he sees the lips move; he reads the words from the expressions on people's faces; sometimes wrongly, sometimes correctly; till at last someone gets up, sits down before him and repeats exactly what he is supposed to understand. But no one had stood up, no one had taken the trouble. Not till much later, when the report had finally pierced her deaf ears, had Elisabeth asked a lot of useless questions. Now, surprisingly, she understood without any help the words that had penetrated from the hall into the next room. She poured out tea for Retzlow, offered him cream. Lieven watched sharply as Retzlow thanked her and kissed his wife's hand. It did him good to see her pull her hand away almost rudely.

But that night, when they two were alone and he came up behind her, she pushed him away almost as rudely. He looked at her with narrowed eyes; he had never been sure whether she liked to be taken by force, or whether she wanted to get rid of him. Elisabeth saw the threat in his tense handsome face. She pulled herself together.

'Don't be cross with me, Ernst dear,' she said. 'I'm dreadfully tired.'

The next day she had herself well in hand: she was courteous and ready with that touch of irony Lieven found so charming. Sometime during the day she would have liked to be alone and think things over quietly. It was impossible that all those dreadful things should be allowed to go on. The men said it was done for the sake of the German people. Because the German people were more important

than anything else, everything was permitted. But if such things were permitted, it could no longer be the most important. She woke up sometimes at night and thought: 'I'd like to take my child and go far away. But where to? There was nowhere to go any more.' Often in her life she had had the desire to get up and go away when her surroundings had become thoroughly repugnant to her; from a school, a love affair; but at those times she had been able to think: 'Oh, if I were only at home again!' Now there was no doubt about the fact that she was at home. She had her own house. She had her own child. Now she had no goal, no escape.

One night she got up because the child was not very well. They had taken advantage of the first snowfall to make snowmen – bright memories of her childhood. The little boy had thrown snowballs and the orderly had been so kind as to pull her as well as the boy round the estate on the little sled. She tucked the child up in his feather-bed and waited till he fell asleep. Far in the distance she heard shooting, but paid little attention to it. She heard voices and doors banging, shouted commands and hasty steps. Lieven came hurrying in, with Retzlow on his heels. They tossed her her fur coat and a few clothes and blankets. She made a sign not to wake the child. But Lieven said in a loud voice:

'Pick him up at once. Dress yourself quickly. We'll put all the stuff you can't wear, outside in the auto. You two must get away at once.'

'You seem to have gone crazy. What's the matter?' she asked.

'I'm not crazy,' said Lieven. 'That gang has played a trick on us. They have cut off the main road; they have cut all our wires. You'll have to go down the highroad, then turn left onto the country road. Then you'll have the highroad behind you. Back there is still another way through. They are probably right in front of the village. We'll soon liquidate them. But because it isn't quite certain, it is better for you and the child to get out.'

She was not in the least upset, rather a little amused. Retzlow declared the gang had suddenly got together in large numbers – made up apparently from a few small scattered and unimportant groups still hiding out in the woods. They had already attacked the neighbouring village, probably with the help of the villagers who had promptly destroyed telephone and radio communications. They had cut down the troops and disarmed a work battalion, thereby gaining enough men to push on to the next village. There was no doubt that they could handle them without any reinforcements; but one could not be sure what might happen till the reinforcements

arrived. Moreover, the reinforcements might not come straight to the estate; they might first clean out the whole region so as to put an end to this business once and for all. In that case they would have to be ready for an attack.

'Don't talk so much,' said Lieven. 'Get going - even if it turns out there is no reason for it. We'll come and get you tomorrow. The main road behind the village is open, the country road is also still passable. It has scarcely begun to snow.'

He picked up the child in a bundle of bedclothes and ran quickly out of the room with him, knowing that Elisabeth would then run after them.

She climbed in behind the steering-wheel because the child lay already packed in the car. Retzlow stuffed in a couple of blankets. Lieven said: 'All right! Get going!' He stood looking after the car as it disappeared. Behind him Retzlow said: 'Wonderful woman!' Lieven said: 'We'll see!' He threw away his cigarette. Then he ordered his men to fall in. Some of them he detailed to cover the estate. The other half he sent to the village. A woman and two men hiding suspiciously in a haystack at the edge of the village had already been shot. There was a report of a young boy found by a roving expedition in the snow; a little spy, undoubtedly. The snow was still much too light; the boy had been quickly liquidated. He had probably thought he could play at being a snowman till the guerrillas arrived.

Lieven took his station at the most vital point, at the western exit of the estate leading to the village. The observer came down from the church tower; he reported that the guerrillas had divided into three groups. The first group had entered the adjacent village. About fifty men were coming along the seashore - the sentries would probably halt them; the third bunch was coming, scattered in a number of small groups, from the open country. It was impossible to get any further connection with the city as all telephone wires had been cut.

After an hour, word came that a regiment from the city was about to encircle the whole region along the sea. Anything could happen in the encircled district before reinforcements reached the estate. From the sound of gunfire on this side of the shore it was obvious that the garrison had not been able to withstand the surprise attack. Retzlow came over to Lieven. Lieven offered him something to drink. He gave the order for his troops to have plenty of liquor at short intervals. Retzlow saw from his friend's face that Lieven did not consider the situation brilliant. But, thought Retz-

low, a situation that worries us seems positively to amuse this Lieven. Aloud he said: 'I'm glad your child and your wife have gone.'

The sentry reported at last that the three guerrilla groups had met and joined. Day dawned. The light seemed to be slow in coming because it had begun to snow towards the end of the night. Retzlow said:

'I hope your wife is in B. by this time.'

'Probably.'

Retzlow thought: 'Does he love her? Does he love anyone? Why does he pull down the corners of his mouth? What does he see so funny in this? Because the shells cutting us off from the village are already bursting on the road? What makes his eyes sparkle?' Lieutenant Schulze was carried in. He was moaning horribly. Lieven bared his teeth, which made him look as though he was laughing. The firing was so heavy now that Retzlow grabbed Lieven by the arm.

'They're already coming over the wall, Lieven. What now?'

Lieven shrugged his shoulders: 'The end. What else?' And he added: 'Follow me. There's a door to the courtyard.' Through Lieven's head ran a swarm of memories: through how many back doors, through how many courtyards, had he already escaped in his life! How often the Reds had been close on his heels! How often he had fooled them!

This time, however, it was too late. A shower of broken glass fell out of the big window into the hall. The intruders did not even take the trouble to force the main door. They swung themselves over the parapet through the huge windows on the side. Then the main door gave way. Now they had caught him. No help for it. The game was up. There was nothing left but to be a good loser, to make the best of it. He stared towards the faces that looked to him so distorted with hate that their eyes and noses and mouths did not seem to be in the right places. One of them came at him with the butt of his gun. He heard a sharp command. Their group leader – or whatever he was – stepped between them: the gun butt was lowered. Now they stepped back a pace, opposite him. The leader came up close to him. He was a young man; he looked very well in spite of his dirty uniform. What does our enemy, the Englishman, say in a situation like this, thought Lieven? 'Take it easy.' He reached for cigarettes; he held them out under the Red's nose.

'Paschaluisa, Towarisch.'

The Red knocked the cigarettes out of his hand.

'Take him away!' he ordered.

Lieven put one foot forward, he took a step: he was seized from the right and the left under the arms. He made a great effort to walk the few steps over the cement court to the wall as lightly and indifferently as possible. The snow was badly trampled. How hideously green were the faces against the wall! His own, he hoped, was not green. Good old Retzlow was already standing there too. Even at the silliest card games he had never known how to control his nerves when he was losing. 'I almost stood before the wall of an estate like this once before, somewhere on the Baltic, at what's his name, old Kaschewnikow's. But that time I managed to slip out of it at the last moment. I really could have spared myself all the worry and excitement of these past twenty-seven years. It seems, unfortunately, that we've lost. Take it easy! The game is up.'

Elisabeth had already turned off the main road into the country road. Involuntarily she crouched low when the shooting sounded close behind her. Though it was much further away than she thought, she had the impression each time that the shots were aimed at her. If they hit her, the child, lying quietly in his feather-bed, would be lost. The Reds would find the car, they would discover the sleeping child; she would not longer be able to protect him. She remembered an incident her mother had told her: the Bolsheviks had attacked the estate belonging to a relative of theirs, up here, in 1917. The old nurse had tried to protect the baby. The Reds had snatched the baby from her. What for? The brood must die too. She drove in a half circle out of the side road to reach the main road again. The shooting was now to the right behind her, like a thunder-storm in one place in the sky. A fresh snowfall filled the night with silence. The engine coughed: only yesterday Lieven had cursed the miserable petrol. She steered straight out across the field and came to the main road behind the bend as Retzlow had urged. He had been more anxious about her, on the whole, than Lieven. She thought, as she drove off, that, once round the half-circle she was as good as safe; she stopped the car, pulled off her gloves and reached for the pump. She pumped the petrol through, pulled the thick gloves on again and got in behind the wheel. For a few minutes she drove towards the west. The engine coughed and then stopped dead. 'It can't be helped,' she thought. 'We two, the child and I, will keep warm.' She saw the lights of the nearest village shimmering faintly through the woods. Day and night, patrols from V. crossed patrols from L. on the main road. She would soon run into them. All she

had to do was to be patient. The child slept soundly; he was not even aware of the snow, now falling thicker and thicker. Perhaps it was better to wake the child and reach the village with him on foot. She knew the country like a book; she was not afraid. She woke the child: he was surprised, but obedient. They had to cross two little slopes, then the land as far as the village was as flat as a plain. Here inside the woods there was no sign of snow; the child liked to see the snow. Soon he did not feel like walking any farther. Elisabeth grew warm from carrying him. She was sweating even, but she was strong. She would soon manage the short journey – an hour at most. After the first slope the lights looked clearer and closer at hand. From the second slope she saw that they were not village lights at all, but the reflection of the moon on a little lake. How could there be village lights in the night after all? They were not allowed to have any lights. She decided to carry the child back to the car. They would just have to be patient and wait. She climbed back over the slopes and, making a great effort, toiled uphill again. The snow now blew in her face. On the little slope it was noticeably heavier. She set the child down on the ground till he began to fret; then she carried him pickaback. That was fun. The child laughed. Perhaps she had not crossed the right slope; she could not recognize the main road. She set the child on his feet: he cried and begged to be picked up. Again she carried him on her shoulders, only to put him down on his feet because he was too heavy.

They took a rest under some heavy branches that kept off the snow. She wanted to get up and go on, but it would not matter if she rested just a little longer. Patrols coming on her car would certainly fire signals. She would then be able to answer from here.

The fighting in the direction of the estate had stopped now; the sound of shooting came from a distance just as almost every night. She had forgotten her wrist-watch. What difference does it make, she thought, what the hour is! Suddenly almost everything was a matter of indifference to her. In the snowstorm old, long-forgotten pictures appeared, whirled past and vanished. She thought: 'Where did I read that, or who read it to me: "We human beings count: he counts nothing. He counted only three things: the leaves of the past summer, the snowflakes of the coming winter and my heart-beats"?''

She pulled the child's head down on her lap: he rolled himself together like a hedgehog under the cover; his eyes closed. The snow now began to come through even the heavy branches. How good the snow felt! It did not thunder; it did not make men bleed,

it merely made them quiet. It did not hurt. With a tremendous effort she pulled off her gloves to feel for the child through the blanket. He slept quietly. She could not tell whether his little body was as warm as her hand or as cold. She thought: 'We two are together! If I could only pray for us now! I am too lazy to pull on my glove; the blankets keep my hand just as warm. Yes, if thou wert there, our Father in Heaven, then thy name would be praised. Thy kingdom would come, thy kingdom, not the Reich they talk so much twaddle about. Thy will would be done, in Heaven and on Earth, and not the Will of this Fuehrer - aeroplane squadrons in thy heavens and bombs on earth. Thou wouldst give us our daily bread; I would then be filled, not always hollow and empty. Thou wouldst not lead us into temptation, tempting us to take whatever offers; love and money and presents, not even the child of Lieven, whom I stopped caring for long ago; not even this manor-house I loved so dearly. Thou wouldst forgive us our trespasses, even mine - though I have always wanted to live as I wished and would never listen to anything that might spoil my pleasure. As we forgive those who trespass against us - how could those women who were driven like cattle, stark naked, in front of Lieven and Retzlow and Schulze, forgive us? But thou, thou wouldst manage to forgive; it would be just as quiet in thy kingdom as at home. At home it is always quiet, even now. The snow is quiet; for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, Amen!'

II

Christian Nadler had been wakened by the flak and lay for a quarter of an hour on his camp-bed trying to get to sleep again. As a rule he had no trouble in sleeping. But tonight it suddenly seemed to him as if not only all Berlin was about to be blown up but the world itself. He had often wondered why he clung to this particular piece of earth which he had certainly not sought of his own accord but on which he was fated nevertheless to perish. In the last war, as he lay in the hospital, crazy with pain, he had tried to puzzle out why he, of all people, had run into all this misery. But tonight with bombs bursting, with the devilish noise of the flak artillery, with speedboats dashing about, and patrol signals all round the lake, each single shot sharp and angry, he lay on his bed and wondered why he had happened to land on just this part of the earth. After all, he was not a bit safer in his shack than in front of his door. It was forbidden to go out of doors during an air-raid, but not even the patrols would

pay any attention if he slipped out on his dock. Whereupon he slipped out of bed and out of the door.

Searchlights flung a network of light strips over the sky above the city. Single meshes of this net closed swiftly trying to catch an enemy flyer. And sometimes a plane in flames plunged down into the city where fires were already burning in various places. The crashing, flaming planes seemed to Christian just as strange, just as impossible to understand as meteors. The fires in the heart of the city and around the edges stirred neither anger nor pity in him. He did not connect them with men and women burnt to a cinder, with death cries, with widows and orphans. He even followed the battle between two flyers, both of them caught in a mesh by the searchlights, as unmoved as if he were looking at a freak of nature. He remained unmoved even when one of the flyers crashed, almost simultaneously with the enemy he had shot down.

Raising his head, Christian could see the evening sky through the meshes, high above the net made by the searchlight fingers. The sky was full of stars which Christian knew well from his boyhood days. He knew that to the left above his projecting roof stood the Pleiades, and still farther to the left and above, the Twins. He noticed unconsciously that the corner stars and the inner stars that made up the Pleiades were still in full number. The stars were on the other side of the net. They could not be caught. He did not know what surprised him, nor even exactly what comforted him. He looked back at the burning city. Planes were dropping bombs and being driven back, or caught in the light of the searchlight fingers. Once more he noticed that all the stars lay outside this net. Compared to the searchlights, the firebombs and the fires, the stars were just shabby celestial luminaries. He saw a flaming plane plunge like a rocket into a part of the city that was already burning; fires touched off perhaps this minute by a bomb. He compared the height of the burning houses with the height from which the burning plane had plunged, and the height from which the plane had fallen with the height of the network of searchlight fingers. When he then compared the latter with the height of the stars outside that net, Christian felt a sense of comforting calm. The wild pounding of his heart, unconsciously following the rhythm of the furious anti-aircraft fire, ceased as if he had discovered something above and beyond all manmade horrors - something he himself could hold on to.

The rest of the night he lay on his camp-bed with his arms crossed under his head. He thought about his wounds from World War I and how they had saved him from death in World War II. Tonight

he was glad Liese had not yet moved over to his shack. Now that he was certain she would live with him till the end of his life, united before God and men, the fulfilment of his wish no longer seemed to him wholly a gain. He had often complained about his solitude before; but now that he knew he would have her with him always, a night like this spent in meditating on strange thoughts meant for himself alone seemed to him particularly alluring. Towards morning he fell asleep.

Liese woke him up, but not to hear how he had got through the night. She had been crying and, at first, she could scarcely speak for grief. Christian sat up straight when she finally managed to say: 'It's Karl!' He lay down again and crossed his arms under his head as she went on: 'He's as good as dead now. He's been taken prisoner by the Russians.'

'Well! What are you howling about anyway?' said Christian. 'You'll be sure to see him again.'

'But you know what they do with their prisoners. You know how they treat them. I can't believe he'll ever come back safe and sound. After the way his parents have behaved. That wouldn't be real justice.'

At that Christian decided to sit up.

'Now I'd first like to know what justice has to do with Karl,' he exclaimed.

For the first time Liese voiced the thought she had hinted at so often before.

'After all God could count up and know that he was our son, yours and mine. And he would hardly let us have our happiness with that particular son when the others are dead and gone. We haven't deserved that.'

'Now kindly leave God out of this,' Christian said angrily. 'He has nothing to do with it. He doesn't care anything about what happened between us: I've told you all that before. He really has other things to worry about now than justice. We'll get the boy back, specially from the place he is now. It's the best thing that could have happened to him.'

The news had struck deep with him though he was as hard and splintery as a slate; he was heartily glad when Liese ran back to the village. The dog first placed his paws on the edge of the bed and then, as his master did not move, on Christian's breast. Christian talked to the shining golden yellow eyes:

'As good as dead. Dare one really say such a thing about a living person? I call that a sin.'

The dog pushed his cold nose against him. Christian did not push him away because he was too lazy to move his arms that were crossed under his head. He kept his face still so that Widu could lick his wrinkles.

'We won't let anyone talk us out of knowing we're going to see our boy safe and sound again, Widu. You'll get your bowl right away. First bring me my bag.'

The dog performed the trick his master had patiently taught him. Christian was proud of this trick; Widu brought the bag in which bread and the tin of lard were kept, between his teeth. He waited, trembling with greed, but not offering to grab, till Christian had divided a morsel between himself and the dog.

III

While Wenzlow's daughter, Anneliese, was in the little town attending to paying for a shipment of goods, she ran into another young girl whom she had often seen talking with the headmistress of her school. Part of the estate had always been worked by a troop of land-workers, but since most of the men had gone to the war the work in the fields was left to labourers brought from the East, women for the most part. The young girl, wearing a uniform with insignia and carrying herself with a military air, looked cheerful, even a little comical with her curly, short hair. She was standing in front of a group of Ukrainian women field-workers, quartered in the barracks of the land-workers. Like all the people around her, Anneliese saw nothing strange in bringing women from a conquered and occupied country and using them for an urgent job for which Germany lacked the necessary hands. It was, she thought, indispensable and sensible. Nor was she curious about the young, good-natured forewoman with the short-cut, rather comical curly hair. She was simply curious to get a good look at the strange girls and women. Now and then she had gone to the outskirts of the camp, when the new arrivals were being fed. With what greed they flung themselves on the bits of food dealt out to them! The girl had thought them frightening, not like ordinary human beings.

The reports of her fellow pupils confirmed what she had seen. These women had been driven out of their homes in the East to be sent into private houses and farms selected by the authorities, there to work as helpers. They were so dull and obtuse that they never seemed to understand orders and the only way to get anything out of them was by harshness and threats.

From childhood Anneliese had fashioned a kind of creed for herself out of scraps of beliefs gleaned from people she loved and respected and from her own odd precepts; exactly as a race makes its own law out of vague tradition and doubtful observance. As with everyone, two desires were at war in her mind. She wanted to be something special, all on her own and, as sooner or later being alone is an unsatisfactory condition, she hoped to ally herself with people who had the same interests. She had once incorporated in her own special creed the words that had been the ruin of Pastor Schroeder: 'In the sight of God all men are equal.' And she worried continually, wondering how she could reconcile this phrase with all the other phrases she heard daily from the mouths of the people around her: relatives, fellow pupils and teachers. She sought a remedy that would not ostracize her from her group, but also would not deny her faith. If these Russians were really not human beings, then in the sight of God, before whom all men were equal, they did not count as humans because they had no souls. It was true that those Russian prisoners behind the barbed wire, who fought for stinking meat and mouldy bread, those women with their burning eyes, who would not get up from their straw beds till they were prodded by the butts of guns, did not look like any human beings Anneliese had ever seen. Nevertheless she wanted to have a look at those creatures from close to. She shyly asked permission of the young forewoman who looked so military except for her curly hair and her full breasts. The forewoman shook her head. Not that she had anything against Anneliese—in fact she rather liked this short, squat, shy young girl who could never be a rival. But such visits were not allowed.

At the end of the week, however, Anneliese found a better opportunity. She arranged to be sent to the young forewoman with information about how they put up the bean poles over there at the main building on the estate and how to prune tomatoes: 'Leave only the main growth and one shoot; cut away all the other shoots.' The forewoman turned the work over to her helpers. Three or four of the foreign girls were called up. Anneliese pretended to be digging, but she managed to get a good look at the prisoners nearest her. This young girl with the strangely white lips in her sunburnt face looked back at Anneliese just as curiously, with despair in her deep blue eyes with the sickly dark rings around them. Both girls turned sharply away, only to look at each other again, embarrassed when their eyes met. Both pressed their lips together to hold back the same question: 'Are you really a human being too? You, from this strange race?'

Anneliese walked slowly up the hill, deep in thought. Her head ached from thinking. She walked in and stood before Frau von Uhlenhaut. Her lips moved but she could not manage a word. Then she turned and walked away, leaving the headmistress to stare after her in surprise.

Anneliese had saved her pocket-money for the long trip to Potsdam to visit Tante Amalie in her holidays. Tante Amalie had had a fall, but as she was ashamed of bodily and physical weakness she refused to stay in bed and walked about leaning on a cane, which made her look more than ever like Frederick the Great. Anneliese noticed that her father's sister, Lenore, now looked almost exactly like Tante Amalie, but without the cane. Lenore's eyes, however, changed constantly – now dark blue, now bright blue, now glowering, now shining softly. Perhaps Frederick the Great's eyes had shone softly at times too?

Since Germany had been in danger, Tante Amalie paid frequent visits – though walking was difficult for her – to the grave of the old king. And she was not alone: other members of the old Potsdam families made the same pilgrimage, a little shyly, a little embarrassed at so openly admitting their need by this visit to the grave of their hero.

Tante Amalie was secretly glad to have her favourite niece relieve her of troublesome housekeeping. Anneliese busied herself planting vegetables and showing her aunt what she had learnt at her school. Lenore Klemm was seldom at home. At last she had had her wish: there were now so many wounded soldiers that her help was urgently needed. One day, as Anneliese was dusting the bookcase, she came on books she had never seen in her life before. That evening Lenore came into the girl's room quite late. She saw from Anneliese's red face, from the vague look in her eyes, that the child, reading the same books that had once meant so much to Lenore, was experiencing emotions she would have had no chance of knowing in her daily life.

'What are you reading?' Lenore asked, smiling.

'A young man kills the woman who lends him money because he wants her fortune. The girl he loves tells him: "A human being isn't a louse".' Lenore was at first startled, but controlled herself. The book had been given her by young Lieven shortly after their brief love affair, unfortunately, as she thought at the time, without any dedication. Now she realized how lucky that was. To Anneliese she said: 'You must hide that book away in the back of the bookcase. The author was a Russian.'

'A Russian?' asked the girl in amazement.

'That's why you'd better put it away,' said Tante Lenore.

In Potsdam Sunday was still like the Sundays of the days before the war. Everyone gathered for tea at the Malzahn house, Lenore in her nurse's uniform, on leave. The guests were as familiar with the Mediterranean as with Schwielowsee. They mentioned Italian names as easily as Russian. The old familiar faces were still there - Hauptmann Stachwitz, who always managed to arrange his visit when Lenore was home on leave, though he thought to himself that the family features were beginning to be very noticeable in her . . . the sharp chin and pointed nose. He himself, in spite of his decorations and the grey hair at his temples and the wound which was the cause of his leave had still kept his boyish countenance. He had so often got himself in hot water and slowed up his promotion by his frank way of speaking that he had become much quieter. Without his caustic remarks that never failed to provoke retorts or laughter, the conversation dragged. When someone spoke of the defeats and disappointments of the past years, his face seemed to close. It was Tante Amalie who first mentioned the name Stalingrad.

'I have never listened to rumours in any war,' she said. 'He would never have dared to surrender and I'm sure he never did surrender.'

Stachwitz said at last: 'Then what should he have done?'

'What he undoubtedly has done: shot himself,' said Tante Amalie.

Stachwitz gazed thoughtfully at her angry face. Anneliese looked from one to the other.

'Oh, Fräulein von Wenzlow,' said Stachwitz, 'if it were as easy as that!'

'What do you mean? You hold your revolver to your forehead and you press the trigger.'

Stachwitz smiled slowly. 'It's not easy at the crucial moment, really not.'

'And yet there are enough examples,' said Malzahn. He mentioned a few names, even the names of friends. Lenore poured out tea for the guests who were still alive - more or less.

'And these names,' said Tante Amalie, 'are written for eternity on our memorial tablets. But of this man history will say: he surrendered to the enemy.'

Lenore said softly: 'And what about his army, the hundred thousand?'

'They should not have surrendered either,' said Malzahn. 'They should have fought to the last man. That was the order.'

'The order from whom?' came the retort in Stachwitz's old familiar sharp tone.

'From our Fuehrer.'

'The Fuehrer, oh well!'

Anneliese stared at him. Though she had heard doubts cast on many subjects, the Fuehrer had always been the Fuehrer ever since she could remember. No one in her hearing had ever doubted him. For the first time she heard a doubt, not in words, but in Stachwitz's tone. And she was afraid. She felt as one would upon first hearing someone say: 'Perhaps the earth isn't stationary after all; perhaps it moves.' And she felt the presence of death stronger than ever in the sudden silence at the coffee table and the vague odour of iodine that clung to Stachwitz's uniform.

The next day she went back to school. There she learned that the strip of land that had been worked by the women prisoners before her vacation had been taken over by government control. She learned also that the young, curly-haired forewoman, together with her bunch of women prisoners, had been sent away. No one had noticed the young foreign girl among the prisoners. In Anneliese's absence, the station had been destroyed by planes and the trains shunted to a provisional depot. A Camp barracks had been set up on the estate for the homeless people from the town. Frau von Uhlenhaut had been able to keep some of her older pupils in her house to help on the strips of land still in her possession. Anneliese was not pleased to learn that she belonged to this privileged group. She longed to go far away to that puzzling, untrammelled primitive state that suddenly seemed easier to attain in the war than before. She longed for work, such as she had never known, among people she did not know.

IV

For some time all military leaves had been cancelled, but Hans was fortunate enough to be picked as one of the guards on a prison train, and that gave him a chance to go home. The prisoners were to be delivered first to a large camp where they would be divided into various sections. There was little food and the meals were irregular.

'We're obliged to deliver back home so and so many thousand prisoners who are able to work,' said the head guard, Kolb, who was in charge of the train. 'If one of them kicks the bucket on the way,

or soon after he gets to the factory that means so and so many less bombs.'

Kolb was a good-natured fellow, a favourite among the men, but foolhardy and sly. Hans had often seen him ice-cold in the midst of danger; only recently he had watched Kolb help to burn a village as cleverly if he had never done anything else in his life and the same day he was ready to comfort and advise and help any of his comrades. There was still a bit of human kindness left in Kolb. Once on the journey he consented to bind up a thumb for one of the prisoners because that thumb would be needed the next day in a German factory to turn out bombs.

Hans did not understand a word of Russian, but he read on the faces of the men in the coach he was guarding that they were a little more cheerful. Maybe they had heard rumours of the Allied landing in France. Perhaps they foresaw the end of their suffering in this stuffy prison train sooner than the men with guns and a varied assortment of hopes. They could scarcely see the countryside from the dark cattle trucks, and every time Hans caught a man's eye it was full of tense curiosity, as if the land through which they were passing could tell them something about those devils, the men who inhabited it. But no matter how hard they stared, the ripe corn was as yellow as ripe corn anywhere in the world; the white highroad ran just as straight and smooth; the stationmaster's house between two beech-trees looked as inviting as a doll-house.

'Now you see how important it is,' Kolb said, 'that our homeland should be spared the horrors of war.' He had forgotten that he himself was one of those horrors.

After delivering his cargo, Hans travelled alone in an ordinary crowded coach to Berlin. The passengers were mostly a lot of old and young people of all professions who had travel permits. It seemed to Hans as if he were entering another planet, not his home town. People asked him all sorts of stupid or shrewd questions, the old woman with the poultry basket asked him whether the war would last much longer. One man seized the opportunity to tell this soldier on leave of his unshakable devotion to the Fuehrer; another to let him see that he knew very well what was going on. But no matter what they carried with them, what they affirmed or allowed one to believe, none of them had understood what Hans did not for one moment forget. Why didn't that old woman understand how unnecessary it was for her to go running around with her poultry? Why didn't the man with the eye-glasses realize that it was unnecessary to profess his loyalty to the Fuehrer, and the man with the

moustache that it did him not the slightest good to give vent to his doubts? For Death was here and now; Death in his dirty uniform sniffing at the foolish people in the compartment. Why did they bother?

As the train ran into the Anhalter Bahnhof Hans thought: 'Why, I know this place perfectly: why am I coming here again?' He walked through a bombed street which he recognized from a curious gable still clinging, undamaged, to the ruins. He ran through a couple of undamaged streets and that showed him he was home. Then came another bombed square – he recognized the district from the street sign which his foot happened to turn up in the rubble. A couple of children, playing in a bomb hole, rode astride a lamp-post lying on its side. Hans felt as if he had brought all this destruction with him; as if before he came it had not been here; as if he could never clear it away.

Newsboys, street boys, the sign on the subway all seemed to pull at his sleeve and beg: 'Oh come now, get rid of Death, you might as well recognize us.' On the journey he had already made up his mind not to go straight home, but to visit his sister. He could make the best use of his brief leave with old Berger's help. He met Helene on the street. Her old job had shut down and she was working in a factory an hour away. When she saw her brother she began to laugh and sob. Her dear, familiar, homely face gradually helped Hans to realize that at last he had come home.

Berger was waiting for the thermos flask his wife was filling for him. Their grandchild was a schoolgirl now with plaits. Their house had not been damaged and the old familiar furniture, with its memories, the little girl's plaits, the smell of the apartment, Frau Berger's long neck – all these helped to increase Hans's feeling that he was really at home. 'I am really here again. This is not a dream,' he said to himself.

He walked to the subway with Berger. The old man looked much younger than when Hans had last seen him.

'I began to grow younger,' he told Hans, 'when you fellows were stopped in front of Moscow. And when you broke your teeth on Leningrad my heart glowed. Then after Stalingrad, the beginning of the end, my stiff old legs became as lively as a colt's. And this year, when you had to retreat and retreat, coughing up here a piece of the Ukraine, there a bit of the Crimea, I looked in my mirror one morning to see whether my grey hair had not turned bright yellow again. When America declared war – everybody laughed just as they did in the first war. We had the same old bulletins from the

ont about shortening the line and all the voluntary manoeuvres, and the songs of heroism – all the same old stuff as before. Only I'd like to hear something from my son, Oskar. I'd like to know whether he was at that part where they shortened the front.'

'He's right,' thought Hans. 'If one could only get rid of all the filth and baseness and be as clean in peace again as one was before the war.'

'And when they landed in France,' Berger went on, 'I suddenly began to whistle. And now, in July, when Hitler almost had his number up – though for my part I'd rather put a rope round that man's neck than finish him off with a bomb. There must have been a spy among the men who tried to get him. They'd have done better to ask old Berger: I knew all the faces better than they did. But I wasn't grand enough for them. They wanted to do it all alone so they wouldn't have us on their backs afterwards. But you can never do anything for the people without the people themselves.'

He pushed his way through the crowd into the subway. Hans kept close to him. Suddenly Berger's words thundered louder than any tanks or any military commands or any orders, 'Resist to the last man'. Death was far off: he dared not come near Hans. For nothing after all had changed here at home, even if it only went on in this crafty old man's head, behind his white eyebrows. As he took leave of Hans, old Berger said:

'I'll send your sister to you. She'll take you to a flat where we can talk undisturbed. We'll get a few friends together who'd like to hear what you have to say – so that we can finally have a true report from the front.'

An hour later Hans went leaping up his own stairs. He stumbled over a couple of children he did not recognize. The hall was as full as ever. The round face of Frau Binder on the second floor was twisted in a grimace of surprise. Doors began opening and shutting.

'Hans!' Marie stood on the landing. She smiled a little, stretching out her arms. Hans grabbed her in his arms and pressed her head to his shoulder. Sometimes in the war he had thought: 'I wish she had not brought me into the world.'

She ran her two hands over him, she clasped his hands. Her face looked suddenly like a young girl's. 'Why are you frowning?' she asked.

'Never mind,' he said. He had remembered a young woman. His sergeant had ordered him to take her child from her arms. He had done so. He had handed the child to the sergeant who had passed it on to the next man on the stairs and he had flung it into the wagon

in front of the door. Instead of screaming the woman had collapsed as if she were suffocated.

Why had he obeyed the command? Because at that time he did not know what would happen to the baby? Suppose he *had* known it? Perhaps each person knew only a part of the terrible things that went on. To get at the whole horror one would have to put all those parts together. This way each man could say: I just handed the child to the next man.

He looked up, surprised that his four walls were still standing, that the hearth with the old pots and pans was still there, and the board on which stood the flowered cup his mother kept her savings in. He put his head on his mother's lap.

'Oh mother,' he said. 'I've often wished I could creep back into you again.'

His mother ran her hand gently over his hair, as she used to when he wept over marbles he had lost. She thought: yes, why did we both let ourselves in for all this? Suddenly she thought in a rush of fear: 'Perhaps it is only a dream: perhaps he is not here at all.' She watched him anxiously as he ate his soup. Now and then he reached out and pulled her towards him. He thought: 'She gave me birth and so here I am really at home.' The door kept opening and people kept coming in – Frau Melzer; Frau Binder, who had almost got into trouble because her daughter-in-law reported her. Hans answered all questions gaily. Then at last Geschke arrived. He had already heard on the street that his son was here. They stared at one another. When the women had left, Geschke said: 'Well, the Russians have done a good job.'

'They'll do much better,' said Hans.

Helene came in the evening and welcomed her brother as if she were seeing him for the first time. She whispered softly to him the number of the house he was to go to on Sunday. The next morning Emmi appeared – the girl he had dreamed about, by day and by night, ever since his last leave. Marie thought: 'She has been waiting too. She too knows what that means.'

The two young people had thought of each other so constantly that they forgot they had not loved each other in reality but only in dreams. They kissed each other silently, as if they had often kissed before. Hans's parents did not smile. They looked on with earnest faces. It was clear to them that there was no longer any time for the old games, for secret meetings and tender wooings.

Geschke had been in the habit of spending an hour on his free Sundays with Diepold, the fellow worker with whom he had formed

a close friendship. Now that life was harder and more serious than ever he found it comforting to have someone with whom he could talk things over now and then. Diepold had a couple of sons at the front and a daughter in a factory. His wife looked after a crowd of grandchildren. Diepold listened attentively to Geschke's reminiscences of the past, and this attention from the friend he admired gave Geschke back a little confidence in himself. Today when he went to work Diepold had asked him whether he would go with him to a neighbour's house. He would find a few others there who all thought the way they did.

Diepold had considered the matter for a long time. He felt that Geschke was thinking along the right lines, but how would he stand up in time of trouble? Should he tell Geschke that this visit to the neighbour's house held certain dangers? In the end he merely said:

'You needn't tell my wife or yours what we hear there.'

'All right,' Geschke nodded. He had understood in a flash. And he was proud that Diepold had chosen him, out of all his friends, to go to this meeting.

Hans climbed the stairs to the apartment where a couple of strangers, a man and a woman, waited for him. The radio was going full blast to drown their voices. What could he tell these people? He had never been good at talking. He started hesitatingly, gaining courage as he saw their interest. When he paused, they asked questions which he answered as he would have answered them for himself. Their orders were to resist to the end, though everyone already knew what the end would be and that it would be as drawn out as long as possible because no one wanted to be killed at the very last. Ten years ago it had begun with fear; now it was ending in fear. And with every day this war, more shameful, more vile than any war, weighed on a man's conscience until he was ashamed to be alive.

Hans did not recognize any of the faces before him, but he had a feeling of being at home with them. Shortly after he entered the room, he was followed by a little grey-haired man and a heavy, big-boned fellow. The two newcomers sat down in a dark corner, and though Hans could not make out their faces the big-boned fellow reminded him slightly of his father, Geschke. The longer he spoke the surer he was that his father was in the room. He thought: 'What nonsense that was when Franz used to try and make me believe his father was not mine. And in the house, people used to say my mother had once gone about with another man. Here we are together in this strange room, in this small group. That's a sign that we belong together and everything else is a lie.'

Geschke had recognized the boy at once. Hans, he felt, was his more truly than any of his children. He had done well not to let anything come between them. And how well the boy expressed ideas Geschke had thought to himself but could not articulate. Even his friend, Diepold, was listening intently to Hans. Why has this all happened to us? What are we guilty of? We have always wanted to have someone to obey, not because he knew more than we do, but because he had power. Power has always been our god, power that others wielded over us and power we have tried to wield over others. We were proud, and we still are, here in this room, because we are better than the majority; because we understand everything better, because we do not let ourselves be fooled. But we have not been able to change the others. And the result is that power remains power and our little band stands alone.

Geschke was not surprised when Diepold, usually so morose and laconic, suddenly took the floor.

'A little group of you fellows at the front,' he said, 'a little group of us at home and between the two a slender thread that may break at any moment. We have always known that the idea will gain power when it grips the masses. Now this madness has become power because it has seized the masses. We had never thought that would happen.'

As Geschke walked home alone - the meeting had broken up fairly early - he was happier than ever. At noon in the kitchen at home he met his son again as if they had come from different directions.

Little by little a throng of visitors came to welcome Hans. The whole quarter had fortunately escaped damage in the air-raids and the house was still untouched. Tante Emilie came weeping, chiefly because she felt sorry for herself. Her old job had closed down and now she had to work in a factory with a lot of other women just as if she had never been able to thread a needle in her life. She had thought that the manager of her old workshop would get her a good job, but he had said it was hard enough to look out for himself let alone provide jobs for his workers. True, Tante Emilie had thought she had meant more than that to him . . . Hans looked at her in amusement. Poor Tante Emilie was so thin, and her hair so dishevelled that there was nothing left of her former glory except a lilac ribbon where her bosom had once begun.

Frau Melzer and her husband also came to see Hans. The curious old woman did not fail to notice that Hans and Emmi were holding hands. As forewoman in her factory Frau Melzer was hated by the

girls under her because of her harshness and the fact that nothing ever escaped her. Her husband was still lively and perky. He talked endlessly about the miracle of an unknown corporal becoming commander-in-chief of the army and the fact that something profound lay behind this and they must all trust in this leader.

Hans suddenly asked after Frau Triebel. A deep silence followed.

'They took her away one night a few months ago,' said Marie.

Frau Melzer said quickly: 'I never trusted the woman. Of course there was never anything you could put your finger on – she never did anything wrong or said anything suspicious!' Frau Melzer was satisfied that the government had the power to take people away on mere feeling, even when there was no proof against them. To himself Hans thought there was no evil that this government did not now make use of, even if it were simply the curiosity of a Frau Melzer.

Emmi stayed for the night – as Frau Melzer noted with satisfaction the next day. She soon had plenty of opportunity to satisfy her curiosity for Emmi moved in with the Geschkes when Hans went back to the front. The girl was happy to be able to stay with Hans's parents. This was the atmosphere in which the boy she loved had grown up: here he had become what he was.

And the atmosphere did not change when he went away. Marie did not even feel like crying. Hans was still on the train that was carrying him faster and faster to the East. He was getting nearer and nearer to the firing. She counted the hours. She felt in her whole body – *now it can happen!*

v

Wenzlow now wore on his breast the decorations he had dreamed of as a boy. Meantime he had learned that recognition and distinctions are not quite the same in reality as in dreams. He had been promoted out of turn: he had prospects of stepping into the place of Loerke on the regimental staff now that Loerke had been killed. Brauns himself negotiated this unusual advancement. In their particular situation, confirmation could be attained only after a long delay. Since Wenzlow had given up his boyish dreams, the rank had seemed to him out of reach; he knew his own limitations; he had already managed to give up blaming intrigues or fate as his father had done. Now he discovered unexpectedly, like a sick man who drinks and yet finds his thirst unalaked, that even the un hoped-for promotion did not reassure him. But since Brauns had obviously

considered him the man for the job, there was only one thing for him to do: measure up to it.

So far they had repelled all attacks with orders to hold their position at all costs. Brauns not only included him in all their conferences, in the place of the dead Loerke, but also sent for him in his most intimate circle and even occasionally saw him alone. They had dwindled away to a third of their original strength, but the enemy had not succeeded in breaking through the outer ring of machine-gun nests at any point. The basin-shaped valley still had communication with the main road toward P., though the enemy already stood at the Weichsel in two places. They had already received reinforcements on this drive and were waiting hourly for the second before the way was closed.

In their bowl – two slopes in Poland – there was a little country town now razed, except for one tramcar and a couple of buildings and cement shelters. The region had been cleared of all remnants of the population who were in the way.

Wenzlow sat facing Brauns with his report. As he listened, Brauns kept tapping on the table with a knuckle of his forefinger, either from nervousness or habit. The shadeless cellar light was white. Wenzlow was pleased that Brauns offered him a drink. His own provision of Schnapps had come to an end; the soldiers had had extra rations given them as a welcoming gesture for the arrival of reinforcements. He informed Brauns that instead of taking the rest of the population under cover on the road to G. as he had been ordered to do, Niehls had shot down most of them in one heap. Wenzlow had objected, and Niehls had driven what was left of the remainder in front of the machine guns.

Brauns's forefinger tapped as fast as he thought.

'Our order contains nothing of this,' he said.

'Certainly not,' said Wenzlow.

Brauns nodded. For one so uncommunicative, this was a sign of emotion. Brauns had had many a set-to with Niehls, the S.S. officer. In his reports and verbal references Niehls had made no bones of his opinion of Brauns – a man filled with old prejudices, incapable of freeing himself completely from the bias of his class. He had often been obliged to work his way through long and bitter opposition to get Brauns's approval of suggestions he considered indispensable for the successful outcome of the war. He often had to persist after point-blank refusals to get Brauns to sign some of his orders.

All that concerned Niehls was to get the signature itself finally on his paper. At one time he used to joke about the loss of time it cost

him to convince the other man of some measure. Now something exceptionally useful had come out of it: proof that they had all acted together in common cause. Wenzlow saw clearly that Brauns was not counting on any change; he was counting on the ring closing. He no longer counted on a break-through from G.; there they needed their utmost strength to stop the enemy before the Weichsel.

Brauns had long since ceased thinking about the unimaginable; he thought only of a minute segment of the possible: papers, orders he had signed, S.S. archives. He considered the idea of a clean break with the men with whom he had been disastrously misled during the war. Judgment Day would have trouble in settling that point, supposing it thought the matter worth considering. Niehls however, set much value on camaraderie.

Brauns and Wenzlow were silent. The camaraderie was complete: it was now too late to separate. Niehls had proved this with a piece he had cut out of a paper. With a wave of the hand he wrote an unmistakable inscription in the air: *'Don't think of surrendering.'*

The vague shadows of a couple of Germans, hanged last year in Kharkov, floated before him. Brauns tapped with his forefinger. But this Wenzlow was honourable. He had even known the man's father in the last war, by no means a pleasant man and with no excess of talent; but honourable, like the son. What did a man like Niehls know of that? The Fatherland is a battleground for his sort of people. Caught together, hanged together. No chance of being taken prisoner.

Wenzlow continued his report on the new allotment of food; the provisions on hand had to last three weeks.

Meantime anti-aircraft fire had become extremely heavy. One burst so near that glasses, writing materials and Wenzlow's jaw trembled; the light went out. Brauns snapped on the battery he had at hand. He pushed the light so that his own face was in the dark and Wenzlow's fell in a blinding circle of illumination. It seemed to Wenzlow that the light in that darkened shelter shone more brightly than any earthly light. After the crash it was so quiet that one could hear Brauns's forefinger tapping like a metronome.

Brauns said: 'Go on. Continue.'

Dropping his eyes to avoid the glare. Wenzlow repeated his calculations. The sentries before the door challenged someone. *Fahrenberg's* voice answered. The sentry reported: *'Fahrenberg.'*

The lights had now come on again. Brauns switched off the battery. Wenzlow was almost relieved because his face was no longer in the circle but merely in the white ceiling light. Brauns

turned his eyes, not his face, to the man who entered. Fahrenberg's face gleamed like phosphorescence. He reported that the house in which Wenzlow was quartered had been destroyed, and the tram-lines as far as the square torn up. Brauns dismissed his visitors. Wenzlow thought later that the fact Brauns had commanded him to make his report had been a particular stroke of luck. But what was particularly good about it? Who could say what was lucky or not?

As he stood up, Brauns asked him to wait a moment. He warned him, Wenzlow, that he must make it clear beforehand in every command, every order, even every conversation, that there could be no thought of surrender.

With a calm gesture, he made a sign that the interview was over. How many seconds had his forefinger tapped, how many minutes?

VI

Marie was almost glad to stand at her factory work from morning till night, too busy to think. At night she fell asleep at once; but always at midnight she woke as worried as ever. And always the thought came to her: Hans is not there yet. Half in dreams she feared that something might happen to him this time. She listened to the last bus; she listened to steps under the window. If he did not come soon, that meant he had gone. When she was fully awake she realized that he would not come any more. Towards morning she fell asleep till the alarm-clock went off. She went to work, wide-awake, sick with weariness, as if her arms were moved by wires outside of her sick body.

At night she said to Geschke as she emptied the soup pot into their plates:

'I can't understand how people stand it, day after day. In the grave at least one has peace.'

Geschke said: 'We all have to bear it.'

'Yes,' said Marie; 'but only because I tell myself that if Hans comes back alive he must find me here. Imagine if we had peace and he came back, glad to be out of it all, and I was dead.'

'That's probably what everyone thinks,' Geschke said. 'That's why no one complains. Everybody loves someone they want to see again.'

It had been a long time since they had exchanged so many words. They ate quietly together no matter how noisy it was in the house. The house had been particularly noisy since the Mehlers had

brought their grandchildren to live with them. The family had been bombed out.

Geschke was so silent Marie thought he had fallen asleep. Suddenly he growled:

'That's just the sort of thinking that is the worst service you can do him.' After a pause he went on: 'And suppose Hans should be killed, what would you do? Not spare yourself any more?'

'If I really knew I would never see him on earth again,' she said, 'then I would not care what happened to me. Then I would rather be dead. I would tell others: "Don't work so hard, don't take so much trouble." That's what I would say. I would also say: "Work slowly, don't do anything well." Then if the Gestapo caught me, what would I care? He would already be dead.'

He looked at her in surprise, frowning. On her bright hair now turning grey at the roots, over the softly swelling forehead, lay a little of the old radiance.

'But I often think,' said Geschke, 'that he'll come back safe and sound if I keep on doing what you want to do if he should die, if I do it without any fear that he may never find us again, without any fear of the big shots or of spies or of the Gestapo.'

Marie looked at him closely, in amazement. His gruffness had disappeared and in his eyes there was a light she had seen only once or twice before, at the beginning of their marriage.

That night Marie lay awake longer than usual.

Her husband's fellow workers told her later the spies had obviously already had their eyes on him at the factory. The only reason they had not seized him before was that outward circumstances had prevented them.

The following day Marie was on a longer shift – twelve hours instead of eleven. On her way home there was an air-raid alarm. She spent the night in a strange cellar. As she started home at dawn she heard people confirming what those in the cellar had suspected: the bombs had fallen in her quarter. Square and street were roped off. When the smoke subsided, she found in the rubble a piece of the façade to which a balcony was still clinging. The police pushed her away from the barriers. As if she were walking in a dream, she persisted in wanting to know whether this balcony was really her own. In the end she learned that it was the balcony directly under hers, the one on which the summer before Frau Triebel used to sit. Frau Triebel, she remembered, had been carried off by the police one night. 'Perhaps she is now in a concentration camp, but still alive,' thought Marie. In her bewilderment she thought: 'It's lucky

that Hans is at the front.' Then she imagined she saw Frau Triebel smiling from her balcony still hanging in the air on the front of the house. But where were her own flower boxes? In spite of her great exhaustion, she had recently sowed seeds in them. No need to worry about the seeds now. Suddenly she screamed: 'Geschke!' A policeman tried to keep her away from the barrier and at the same time to support her. He struggled with Marie, for now she understood that Geschke had come home from his work much earlier. A woman put an arm around her shoulders and drew her gently to a stone behind the chain. Marie recognized the sister-in-law of Frau Binder from the second floor. She became alert and cold on the instant. What is she doing here again? Why is she making up to me? Does she hope that I'll curse Hitler in my despair and she will get another decoration for reporting me? No, Marie would certainly not curse Hitler. He wouldn't get off as cheaply as that. She would do worse than that. Not only had the house gone, not only was Geschke lying somewhere in the ruins, but also her fear. The night before last Geschke had talked about fear. He had been so kind. It had been her good luck to run into him, the man who had let her have her child and bring him up in his home. He had always let the neighbours in the house think Hans was his own son - that had been good of him. Suddenly she remembered the gun hidden in the kitchen cupboard. How surprised she had been when he had pulled it out from its hiding-place - that had been not so long after Hans was born, in March, 1920, at the time of the Kapp *putsch*. If she cleared away the rubble from the house, she could find the gun. Behind the chain she saw the now scarcely recognizable sandbox where Geschke's children had played, the children of his first wife. Here she had watched them at their play when Frau Menzel asked her to keep an eye on them. Was Frau Menzel dead too? Paul had been dead a long time, Paul who had been Geschke's favourite son. At the time she and Geschke had thought they could never have a greater sorrow. She had become so fond of Helene. Franz had quarrelled with his father ten years ago because he was not tall and strong enough to join the S.S. Quarrel with his blackened bones! There you have your regulation cubic measure, Franz!

She leapt forward so quickly that Frau Binder did not have time to catch her skirt. The policeman grabbed her by the arm. Marie struggled with him. She could not make him understand why she wanted to get through the barrier to dig about in what was left of the sand in the sandbox. A milk wagon came from the Hitler Youth. Amazingly resolute and experienced girls gathered together all the

children and gave them food and milk. Marie caught sight of Frau Mehler's eldest grandchild. She called to him. The boy pulled away from her and began to cry.

'Your husband took our Lina on his lap before it struck. And it got them both together.'

Eighteen

I

AS LONG AS the Malzahns were her neighbours Tante Amalie had visited them regularly. But since they shared the Wenzlow house with her, in accord with the ruling which allowed the families to have only one of the two houses, Tante Amalie never came downstairs from the second floor. Smiling, but at the same time irritated, the others obeyed her strict orders: no one was to put a foot inside her flat. Food had to be placed on a little table in front of her door.

She had chosen the second floor for herself, though she was scarcely able to drag her lame leg nowadays, because she was fond of her vari-coloured oriel window. There she sat day after day, looking out on the Scharnhorststrasse, waiting for the post or for visitors. She seldom went out any more. It tired her out even to do her hair and put on her clothes and dust her room. Then she would sit alone between the red and green window-panes, and, when it was too dark to see outside she would search her memory for people who were dear to her; people out of history and out of her own life. She nodded her head and carried on conversations with these ghostly figures. Sometimes she gave an ugly laugh. She made saucy remarks she had heard from the men in her family. She was happy in this company; the guests were carefully chosen, from the Great Kurfürst to her nephew; only rarely were strangers admitted to these meetings, strangers who dared not give cause for offence, like her niece Lenore who spent most of her time far off in a hospital, and her grandniece Anneliese who was heaven knows where. She had no desire for her other relatives: she simply forgot them.

Young Stachwitz came one day to the Malzahns. They told him that old Fräulein von Wenzlow was no longer in her right mind, the

death of her little grandnephew, Wenzlow's only son, which had been kept from her so long, had made a deep impression on her. However, Stachwitz went upstairs and knocked on the door – they had told him she would not let him in.

'It's me, Stachwitz, Tante Amalie,' he called out cheerfully. He heard the old lady shuffle hastily towards the door. She had actually forgotten her nephew's friend. Now, at the sound of his voice she was sorry. He was perhaps a little too cheeky, a little too noisy, but a nice young boy and by no means an unsuitable guest in her cultured circle.

They sat down together in the bay window. She asked about his family, a little timid lest her weak memory betray her, and Stachwitz replied in detail with that false cheerfulness one puts on before old or sick people. He noticed that it was difficult for her to talk; but he could not see that her mind was affected as the Malzahns had told him. She told him things from the letters Fritz wrote from the East. They spoke of the child's death. Stachwitz did not believe that this death had unbalanced her mind. She said frankly that the boy's death might mean the end of their line. Who knows, she added, whether my nephew can have more sons after the war? True, innumerable German families were now in the same predicament. Then she inquired, as severely as ever, about his military career and his war experiences. Stachwitz told her everything he felt at liberty to speak of. And Tante Amalie listened attentively. In the varicoloured light in this bay window it was difficult to make out her features, but he thought it impossible for her to notice where he had skipped things in his recital or where he had simply turned the conversation. She thought a moment then she said:

'Tell me, my boy, do you believe Germany is completely finished now?'

He made a vague gesture.

'My boy,' she said, 'you must not lie. To Tante Amalie you can tell the truth.'

He lowered his head just as he had in his boyhood when she scolded him for boyish pranks. Then so softly that not even a spy could have heard, had one been outside on the trellis near the bay window, he said: 'I'm afraid so, dear Tante Amalie.'

She nodded. Then firmly she said:

'That's what I've been afraid of for a long time. I never trusted the man, your Fuehrer. I never liked him. He is a man from a poor race. And he makes so much of race. He has no background and evil habits. An untrustworthy man without a faith.'

Stachwitz leaned forward. He took her two hands in his, kissed them twice and caressed them.

Later on the ground floor when the Malzahns asked him: 'Well, how did you get on? Didn't you find the old lady terribly changed?' he replied: 'I don't think so at all, on the contrary. Sometimes I feel I have lived through so much that it might well have been a hundred years. We have all altered terribly: Tante Amalie is the only one who has not changed.'

A few days later Tante Amalie got up as quickly as she could. She was anxious to take the letters from the postman's hands herself. Just as she had suffered fifty years before when this Frau von Malzahn, with her demands, came into her life, so now she suffered if this woman so much as read the address on the letters from her nephew Fritz.

When the two families moved in together, they had agreed that Frau von Malzahn should keep the entrance hall clean. But Fräulein von Wenzlow was never satisfied. It annoyed her that the stairs were never polished. She had some good wax polish left over from the years of plenty. One sleepless night she herself scrubbed and polished the stairs and the landing. Now, feeling dizzy than usual as she hobbled out to get the post, her cane slipped on the polished floor. She fell down several stairs and lay on the bottom landing. Frau von Malzahn, coming out to get the mail, found Tante Amalie unconscious and groaning, and shouted for her husband to come and help her.

The next day Lenore came with a staff doctor from her hospital in Potsdam. Tante Amalie had never regained consciousness. Lenore shut herself in with her dead aunt. The old lady's sharp profile seemed to say to her:

'What are you thinking of, my child? One must not give way to one's feelings. You must never let grief get the better of you.' Lenore dried her eyes and powdered her nose.

Stachwitz had decided to call on Fräulein von Wenzlow once more before his leave was up. Lenore opened the door. In the half light, without her nurse's cap, with her severe pale face she looked so like her aunt that he said, bewildered:

'Fräulein von Wenzlow?'

'It's I, Lenore,' she answered, deeply moved. 'Tante Amalie died yesterday.'

II

Marie now lived with two working women in the long barracks-like building that was so near her factory she could go to work in a

quarter of an hour. This was also an advantage for the factory. 'For us particularly,' said Frau Klaeber who lived with Marie. Her two children went to school in the same building, and in her leisure time the eldest did a little light work in the same factory. The mother was a forewoman. She was always neat and clean, her hair immaculately combed no matter what happened. She was in the habit of telling her companions and her children: 'Everything depends on us women; there is no nation like ours and there are no women like ours.'

'How can you know that?' asked Frau Hubner. 'We've dropped bombs enough on the others and they still carry on. London, for instance. And so far our surprise weapon hasn't worked there yet. It looks as though they're sticking it out.'

'Air-raids,' said Frau Klaeber, 'are certainly very different from surprise weapons.'

Frau Hubner said nothing. During the past few months her skin had become so wrinkled, her hair so faded, that she looked like an old crone. Marie never said anything. And their mutual silence was like an understanding between her and Frau Hubner.

Marie arrived at work every morning to the minute. She punched the prescribed holes in the prescribed plate and the girl at the next table pulled the wires through the holes. It made no difference to Marie where she lived or how many holes she punched. As she worked she saw pictures, sometimes of Geschke, thoughtful that last evening, sometimes Tante Emilie in her flowered dress, sometimes her stepdaughter, Helene. But of Hans she tried not to think. Only on Sundays when she was sewing did she let herself do so. At those moments she felt such a pain as if she were burning up inside. In spite of that those were the best moments she had.

Gradually, unknown to her, the shocked condition that follows a blow lessened. One morning she came to the factory as brisk and energetic as of old. She joined the others in cursing the new ruling that compelled the woman to punch twice as many holes in the same time. But no matter how loud she talked no one paid any attention to her. On the way home Frau Hubner asked her:

'Whatever's come over you, Marie? What's the good of this fussing all of a sudden?'

'Let them arrest me,' said Marie. 'What difference does it make?'

'But you have your boy at the front,' Frau Hubner said. 'Suppose he comes home and his mother isn't there.'

Marie laughed. 'Then my boy would be proud of me. He's the very one who'd tell me: "Make as much fuss as you like, Mother. Can't you do something better than swear? You'd better punch two

holes less. Get the others to do the same so that when the stuff comes to us at the front it won't work. When everything begins to work badly, I'll get home all the quicker." That's what he would say.' From that moment Marie knew that she had a friend in Frau Hubner. She was no longer entirely alone in the draughty, rain-soaked barracks at the far end of the gigantic city where she did not know a soul.

The next day there was trouble in the factory. As a punishment their food cards were taken from them. They were threatened with forced labour. A lot of women said they could not, with the best will in the world, punch the prescribed number of holes in the allotted time.

That evening Frau Klaeber said:

'I'm terribly sorry, Marie, this should have happened to you. But they had to do something. They couldn't let it pass.'

'You needn't feel sorry,' said Marie, 'that I happen to have rheumatism in my arm at the moment.'

Frau Klaeber looked at her with shining eyes. 'I thought it wasn't a question of bad will with you, Marie. That was aimed at women who don't understand that every one of us must do our bit. My own arms are stiff. I can't mend or sew any more. But it's more important to work at the factory and make the things needed at the front than to darn and mend for ourselves here.'

That night there was an air-raid. When they came out of the air-raid shelter into the barracks, the block of houses at the end of the street had gone. Part of the barracks had been razed to stop the fire. Those who had been newly bombed out had nothing to lose. They were quartered in the nearest barracks. And through it all Frau Klaeber looked as neat and clean as a pin and her eyes gleamed with a strange light. Her own children looked in alarm at their mother as if she were a ghost. Marie soothed the trembling little creatures.

Both old and new occupants of the barracks were glad when Marie was present. Even in the factory the women felt better when they saw the glint of her blonde head. At first no one had paid much attention to her, during the time when she was stunned and grief-stricken. But all of a sudden she was there again, once more so vividly alive that everyone felt safer near her, as a drowning man clings to a swimmer to keep from going down.

In her division they had been obliged to return to the old standard. But the women were too tired to rejoice over their small victory. What difference does it make now whether we punch three holes less in a plate or not?

'It means, perhaps,' said Marie, 'a second less of war. In one second the bullet can hit my boy or your husband or yours.'

One day Marie took Frau Hubner with her to the part of the city where her stepdaughter lived. Helene was at work, though it was Sunday, old Herr Berger was in his new job and Frau Berger was at home with her grandchildren. A visit from relatives was a surprise these days. And because the house had not been bombed, all the familiar furniture and the old cups were still there. Frau Berger was relieved her son Oskar was a prisoner of war. He was safe. One day she would get him back. He had not been born in vain. Marie felt envious and hard, in despair about her own boy who, as Frau Berger said, had perhaps been born in vain. Frau Hubner put her arm round Marie because she was staring ahead with glassy eyes. Suddenly all three of these elderly women felt that they belonged together, three women with bowed heads who had given birth and suffered and lost their dear ones.

Marie usually stopped at Tante Emilie's before going home. The rubble in the street had not yet been cleared away. In this hole had stood the big house where Marie had so unexpectedly found a home in the strange city. Tante Emilie's house had lost the front half so that you walked straight into the back courtyard where the workshop had stood. Tante Emilie gasped with surprise. She had a frightful cold. Marie thought that her face had changed almost beyond recognition: only what was left of her flowered dress looked familiar. Now the people from the front house who had been bombed out were living in Tante Emilie's house. Marie discovered the large photograph of Tante Emilie's husband, who had been killed in the first World War, still standing in its old place.

As they were on their way home, Marie told Frau Hubner the story of her youthful love affair, even about the night she had waited in vain for her lover, and how passionately she had longed to give birth to her child, as today she longed to keep him alive. Only at that time there had been a force in her that now seemed far, far away. She spoke easily of many things that had hitherto seemed impossible to mention, as if her heart had been torn open along with the walls of her house.

The days passed, one after another: she hurried to work, on the conveyor, with little time in between for sleep, forcing her strength to the utmost, stretching it like a rubber band to snapping point. The days would have been monotonous if they had not been filled

with bombings and fires, with mortal fears and death, cries for help and shattered limbs. But more tenacious than life and death was the conveyor that never stood still, always there to receive one on the night shift when everyone else was sleeping, like a river that flows neither swiftly nor slowly through the countryside in which people are suffering and making merry, giving birth and dying. And between times the radio loudspeakers blared, newspaper boys called out the news from the front. In the beginning it had been said that the enemy could never tread on German soil; now one heard assurances that he could never enter Berlin. There were always a couple of crazy women driven almost insane with fear by the anti-aircraft fire. To calm them they were told the enemy was still far, far off. The word 'still' was already a sort of comfort.

Marie was much too tired at night when she lay down beside Frau Hubner to ask any of the many questions she had had no strength to put during the day. She could still remember how proud her husband had been of the eight-hour day. 'You can thank us for that', he who was no longer here had said in the kitchen, which was also no longer here, to Triebel who had equally vanished. Now the working day was twelve or fourteen hours long, merely to feed the beast that must be kept strong to gobble up everyone and everything. Many who, a few weeks before, had declared quite openly that the war would soon be over and that nothing worse could happen - joined in the cry that the Russians must never come to Berlin. Having already sweated so much blood it was easier to imagine that they had sweated it for a noble cause - for the protection of their land, for the survival of their people. The only earthly measure that seemed to them exact and just was human suffering. By this yardstick of suffering they measured their own worth. They had come to this sorrowful state through stupidity, cowardice, promises, crimes and guilt. Yet, to their way of thinking, it was superior to all other states.

Frau Hubner flung her arm around Marie. Perhaps the war would soon be over and a new life would begin. She could not imagine what her own new life would be like, a lonely old woman, who had lost everything that made life worth while to her. Her husband had been a tinsmith and had earned a decent living; her son had learned the same trade and the neighbours had all said how he took after his father; he was clever, and never out of humour. Sundays in the Hubner home had been like little festivals. Now they were both dead, father and son, the two who had always been gay and full of jokes and never cross. A rush of homesickness for the

lost country of youth brought tears to her eyes. But the tears were invisible because her face was so puckered. To her it seemed as impossible to picture a new life as the coming of the Russians. The newcomers in their barracks clung to Marie. They felt comforted just to be near her. Frau Hubner felt that Marie who was not much younger than she and just as much alone – for in all probability her son would never come back – was able to imagine what the new life would be. She would like to have known just what she thought, but she was too tired to ask her.

She herself was the greatest puzzle. Why did she continue to go to work when, now that her dear ones were gone, she had no desire to live? What sort of power was this State which, like God, ordered people's lives? How had that force become a power? When her thoughts reached this point, her head ached so much that she put her arm around Marie and fell asleep.

III

Councillor of Commerce Castrizius, who, once upon a time, had almost become Herr von Klemm's father-in-law, arrived by car with his beautiful daughter and her husband, an officer in the Death's Head Hussars, at the Taunus villa. The villa belonged to Herr Schluetebock, director in the I.G. Farben Industrie. The three gentlemen waiting for them in the smoking room suppressed their displeasure when Castrizius came in with his daughter and his S.S. son-in-law. All the more as the latter made himself at home, asked for a Schnapps and seemed inclined to discuss at length their Magyar allies' ability to hold out. However, after his wife had reminded him several times of an appointment, he rose. The chauffeur, she added, must come back in time to fetch her father.

When the two had finally left, Castrizius said, with a glance at the sunny winter landscape visible behind the hyacinths at the double windows: 'No wonder the young man likes it here. This is decidedly the most delightful spot in Fortress Europa.'

The four men now settled themselves comfortably in their arm-chairs: Castrizius, Klemm – cousin and heir of the late Herr von Klemm – the owner of the villa, Director Schluetebock, and Councillor Spranger who had just arrived from Berlin.

Castrizius looked slyly at the men one after the other. Then he said:

'Gentlemen, do you remember the old nursery rhyme:

"Fifty years is fine and bright,
Sixty's getting on for night,
Seventy – the grave's in sight"?

'You, Klemm, are fine and bright; you, Schluetebock, are beginning to grow old, and Spranger and I? With us it will soon be seventy. Seventy is senility.'

They cleared their throats in embarrassment and Spranger thought he was better protected against old age than this Castrizius who had become unbearably talkative. He, Spranger, was a man of great vitality. His carefully shaved face never betrayed any emotion, not even his feelings at the death of his wife, the former Swedish beauty, who had died last winter of cancer.

'To be quite frank, Castrizius,' said Schluetebock, 'I was surprised at the guest you brought here with you. I thought it was understood that there were to be just the four of us.'

'My dear fellow, my poor friend,' said Castrizius who used even the defects of old age to his own advantage, 'I particularly urged my S.S. son-in-law to drop me here at the villa. It is much better for us not to be a quartet, much safer for us to have witnesses so that we are not accused of secret scheming. We've had enough unfortunate examples in that respect. You must not be angry at me, an old man. It looks to me as if you still had not had enough after twelve years of Adolf Hitler. National Socialism, I think, will last till we've learned our lesson.'

There was a moment's silence. The cleverest of those present, Spranger, was the first to acknowledge that this gossipy old man was, as usual, right.

Aloud he said: 'You and Castrizius, Klemm, that is, your cousin, the late Klemm, were in a big enough hurry to get into the Hitler boat.'

Castrizius flung up his arms: 'The ghosts I have called up will never leave me. Who said that? If it wasn't Schiller, it was Goethe. In any case one of the two gentlemen who were always making up quotations on all subjects.'

'I have other problems with my son-in-law. I'd like to know what the crowd in Yalta is up to. I'd like to send my son-in-law as far away from here as possible. But God help me, not to the nearest Russian-occupied territory. I assume our enemy, the Englishman, has reserved a little strip for himself in the north. I'd like to shove the young man up there in due course. We'd have had a clearer view of the situation long ago if this Rundstedt could have forgotten his pride. But he has always been used to hurling himself against the

enemy and winning. Result: now, when we've still got plenty of victorious generals in the West, the Russian is coming on top of us dangerously fast and our Western neighbour dangerously slowly.'

Courteously, if impatiently, they let him babble on.

'For this son-in-law of mine,' Castrizius went on, 'has unfortunately not a good reputation here. He must get far away where he is not known. Of course he's still as much in love with my girl as the first day; a model husband, a miracle of faithfulness. Pays no attention to women, except when his duty takes him to women's camps and things like that. It seems people hold it against him because he wasn't out to get just men, but also a couple of crazy girls. You only have to see the faces when he rides out on his black charger to guess what they would do to him if they could. That's why I say - get the young man out of the way. My daughter has had enough bad luck in love.'

Meanwhile Klemm was thinking: 'What if my nephew should suddenly turn up here on his way from the Eastern front to the West, with all sorts of demands on the firm?'

Spranger said emphatically:

'We had better get down to the purpose of our meeting. I am afraid our time is short.'

Schlutebock added: 'It is a pleasure to me to have these gentlemen under my roof.'

Spranger continued: 'I'm not speaking now of the time the Herr Direktor is so kind as to place at our disposal. I'm speaking of the time the Allies are still so kind as to place at our disposal. I think these gentlemen are also counting on the fact that we know how to use our time. It is no accident, I feel, that their air war is sparing certain points. Certain points important for the continuation of European industry. . . . Even before I myself have had an opportunity to talk things over with them, I venture to state that over there they too are placing certain hopes in men like you, gentlemen; like us, gentlemen.'

Because of his excellent standing in Berlin and his connections with the Swedish Embassy, he had once received the astonishing permission to attend a Stockholm conference. Not only for himself but also for his friends, this journey was a great piece of luck. They had hoped that, once abroad, he could renew connections that had been broken by the war. They hoped, through his diplomatic handling of matters to be able to resume relations before they were made more difficult by military occupation or were entirely destroyed. Schlutebock had given Spranger full power to handle certain nego-

tiations. There were patents they had held together with foreign firms before the war. Though the inventors were dead or had disappeared, and the factories were partially destroyed, the patents themselves lay untouched in the safe in this beautiful house on the Taunus slope that no plane had ever disturbed. Spranger made notes for numerous commissions. He would learn them by heart on the way, for his memory was still as unimpaired as his handsome and clever head. At the sight of that head in the conference hall at Stockholm, friends and enemies alike would say: 'Ah! so that chap Spranger is here too!'

IV

The motorized company in which Hans served drove along the last stretch of the highroad under enemy fire at such furious speed that a transport of women prisoners, at that moment crossing the road on foot, failed to get over in time.

Looking down from the truck behind him, Hans saw on the highroad the ugly mess of bloody snow and pieces of clothes and a foot whirling around in the dirt of sand and snow under the wheels. By that time the fifth truck had already driven over the dead. He had no time to say a word to Schilling who sat beside him, no time even to think; he only knew, as if it had been hammered into him, that in that mess of blood and snow and torn rags and flesh that lay there motionless on the ground, there was something that is never lost.

The truck took the curve so fast that he fell against Schilling. Shells whizzed above them. He would have been hit if he had been sitting upright. Schilling pulled him down on the floor because he wasn't exactly sure which was Hans and which his own body, possibly, too, because he wanted to keep Hans from standing. They had been together only two days since the new company had been formed and they had been thrown in to reinforce the encircled basin. But Schilling was as eager for Hans to remain alive as he was himself. He exchanged thoughts and food with him. The presence of death had speeded up a friendship which, ordinarily, would have needed more time.

The order came: 'Get out!' The road behind the curve was impassable; the truck turned back. The men walked the rest of the way on foot. In separate groups they started out on the road through the woods that separated them from the valley. Every second they flung themselves flat on the ground. Shells whizzed over their heads. There was the sound of branches snapping among the beeches. Henkel squeaked out and wanted to know where they were all

hiding. Hans recognized his voice. For two years Hans had suffered from the sound of that voice, though he had often had hopes of getting rid of the man. Henkel had taken the place of Stimpert who had been killed: he was Stimpert all over again only far more rabid. Whenever a man lay down to rest Henkel was sure to be there. He was on to everything, as if the devil had ordered him to bring them all alive to hell. Two men now helped along a third who had been shot in the leg. And Stricker, who had joined the company only yesterday, lay under a fallen tree trunk; his white young face distorted with pain. Henkel rushed over to him. The tree was lifted; Stricker screamed – his chest was crushed. Once again, Hans heard Stricker's voice imploring Henkel – but there nothing was to be done. They could not carry him back; they could not carry him along with them.

Hans lay close beside Schilling. He thought: 'Henkel is in front of me now. I can lie still here. No one has any desire to carry me along. No one will touch me. I'll just crawl into the bushes. I'll lie still. The Russians will find me.' Schilling looked at him out of the corner of his eye. Hans winked. 'You can't do that now.' Hans followed Schilling's eyes and there was that damned Henkel right behind them and looking sharply from one to the other.

The men could tell by the sound of the machine-gun fire that they were near the front. A shout of triumph came from a bush, ten yards ahead. A command followed: then a shot. One of the women from the prisoner's transport who had not been crushed but had fled to the rear had been discovered in the bushes. She had been shot, but looked as if she had been torn to pieces by wild animals, her legs twisted, pieces of flesh hanging from her thighs, a bunch of hair on her shoulder, nothing left of her face. The men did the last part at the double. Bullets whizzed past behind them as if Death were drawing farther away.

They were welcomed with shouts of joy as if they had all risked their lives, not to die with the others, but to rescue them from death. As a reward they were given a few hours' sleep. Hans was so exhausted that he needed all his strength to ask Schilling questions instead of dropping off to sleep at once. He knew that he could trust Schilling and he wanted to ask him frankly what he had not dared to ask even himself for weeks. In the village of C., from where they started, he had observed Schilling's expression three times. Schilling's round, boyish face made it easy for him to hide his thoughts from spies and informers. Hans thought he would rather die with Schilling than

with anyone else. Perhaps it was only friendship. He asked: 'Why didn't you shoot Henkel when he was lying in front of you?' If Schilling was surprised at this question his face did not show it. It was just as cheerful and round as ever. He said: 'Because no one stands with me. They would have torn me to pieces perhaps just as they did that poor woman. You heard their shout of triumph.'

'We don't dare to do things,' Hans said, 'because we don't believe anyone is with us. But no one will join us till someone makes the attempt.'

'If I had shot down that damned Henkel and I had been wrong in believing others were with me, then I wouldn't be lying here with you. I didn't trust them and I'm still alive. I'll save my strength for something better than that miserable Henkel.'

'Once when we first came to Russia,' said Hans, 'I had a friend named Zimmering. I had known him before, not as with you, just two days. He kept warning me just as you do; he was always telling me: I want to save my strength for something better. But he kept putting off the "better" so long that in the end it was too late.'

Schilling began playing with the buckle of Hans's belt. He had the habit of fingering anything that caught his attention. 'What this hooligan and his crowd have drummed into people! It goes deep and we won't get rid of it so easily even when he's dead.'

The bursts came so close that they drew near together. They looked each other in the eyes. A couple of men leapt up, two others flung themselves restlessly about; someone snored steadily. As Death withdrew his shadow Hans saw his comrade's head, much plainer and larger than before. Schilling said softly: 'In danger we crept into the rathole to die with our fellow rats. Why did you obey? For the same reason. Because you knew that refusal to obey would promptly cost you your life. To get a reprieve from the gallows.' He broke off. 'Are you asleep?'

'No,' said Hans. It was torture to keep awake. This, however, was the time to talk or never. 'For ten or fifteen years they've been drumming into us this stuff about national unity so that the people would think they were sacrificing everything for their nation. And if the end is coming now, this is the time most of all when they need national unity. The individual they can hang, but not the nation. Are you listening?'

'I hear,' said Hans. He flung his arms around Schilling as if he could draw wakefulness from him.

'Hans, don't sleep, keep awake! This is the only place we can make any plans. Henkel is so all in that he's asleep.'

'How do you know that?'

'He's lying there, three men behind you. He's not pretending to sleep, he's really sleeping. You don't want to begin at the beginning, but at the end: killing Henkel. We must begin again from the very beginning: sift what is on top, what is at the bottom; who is a friend, who an enemy. That takes years.'

'We haven't that much time,' Hans said.

'No,' said Schilling, 'just a few hours. But to teach them anything you have to keep alive first of all. The man who shows them a prospect of that, he's the one they will listen to first. We must ferret out the fellows who don't want to die just because they are ordered to! You and I found each other in forty-eight hours. We must make sure of them. For instance I'll take over Braunewell right away.'

'I'll take Roeder,' said Hans. 'He came over with me from the old company. I know him.'

'Then the question is, how do we discover more who are fed up? Next comes: "How do we approach the Russians? How do we give the Russians the sign, you can get through this way?" If we're alive by that time . . .'

'Henkel is not sleeping at all,' Hans said. 'He's squinting over here at us.'

'Let him squint,' said Schilling. He had turned himself slowly around and lay with the back of his head against Hans's chest. He went on talking for a while, with his eyes closed, then he noticed that Hans too was now asleep. He pulled his arm out from under him. He was a furrier by profession and his wife was a furrier too. Sometimes he had thought: she has to take care of the children all alone now. But he had always hoped that he would still come back. Now he was no longer so sure that he would get back alive.

As he fell asleep Hans tried to picture to himself all the people he had loved. All he could remember of Martin was his close-cropped bullet head - nothing else. Old Berger with his white bushy eyebrows he saw much more clearly. Emmi he still remembered was very small and had dark, almost wicked eyes and bumps on her forehead. And his mother, her forehead was all bright up into the roots of her hair. And why is Henkel suddenly sitting in Berger's flat? Go to sleep. Don't worry about it, said his sister Helene. Let him look at you.

v

Frau von Uhlenlaut had been thinking for some time of giving up her school, but it was a bitter pill to be compelled to do so. Her

estate and her poultry farm would be run by the government; the girls would be sent into war work in accordance with the new laws. Because she was seriously ill, she was permitted to keep one woman to help her with the work. Her choice fell on Anneliese Wenzlow. She had long realized that the characteristics the Hitler Youth Group, in their confidential report, had warned her about had not disappeared as the child grew older. She had often said to herself that one child like that made the whole school worth while. But she was not strong enough to show her contempt for the supreme power of the State any more obviously than by her affection for the unpopular girl. To live in rebellion and contempt would have meant a hard life and she did not feel herself capable of it.

But when she informed Anneliese that the girl could remain with her, she met with a bitter disappointment. The girl said coldly:

'I'd rather go into a factory with the others.'

Frau von Uhlenlaut choked back her retort. It seemed to her that she had caught this girl offering her precious youth to the State which – as she had long known secretly – would devour youth after youth, till it came to an end when the war was over.

When the school was given up, Anneliese slept in the little sitting-room, which the headmistress had cleared out for her next to her bedroom. She cried at night, a thing she was not in the habit of doing. Once again a hope had been frustrated. To the hope of getting away into new surroundings that had nothing to do with the old. That life would have been hard, coarse and dirty; but for her there would have been a sort of freedom in forced labour. Now she had not come into freedom, but into Frau von Uhlenlaut's intimacy. She did not notice her former headmistress's efforts to enlist her sympathies; she did not think much of the subtle, gentle contempt of the State which the woman let her see. She still thought frequently of her old school chaplain Pastor Schroeder, on whose account she had fallen into difficulties that time at school and at home. He had not stopped with irony; he had never been one to hold back when it was a question of God; nor had he avoided the sufferings which Frau von Uhlenlaut – as the girl was well aware – had cleverly avoided. She felt alone, deprived of all the old ties, but without any new ones. Tante Amalie was dead; her mother was as good as no mother; her father was out of reach; she was like a little foundling.

However, she got away sooner than she had hoped. One night Frau von Uhlenlaut woke her: she was yellow in the face and groaning. The illness resulted in a permit to travel to Stuttgart; the girl

was allowed to accompany her on the journey to the hospital run by Frau von Uhlenlaut's brother. Suffering unbearably from the jolting of the car, Frau von Uhlenlaut said good-bye to her manor house. She talked without any restraint of her fear that she might end her life miserably in a strange corner of the land in a hospital. The child was not adept enough to comfort her. She resembled her Tante Amalie in her deep-seated dislike of loud complaints and doubts, of scruples loudly expressed, of barefaced terror. Nor was she pleased that this woman now groaning with pain suddenly wore a silver cross around her neck, though when she was well she had worn a swastika in order not to give offence.

The train was overcrowded. Anneliese managed to get a seat for Frau von Uhlenlaut. She herself sat down on the floor of the crowded compartment. Fear of an air-raid alarm kept the passengers awake and excited. They talked to each other and complained. Frau von Uhlenlaut lay back in her seat, either unconscious or asleep. Anneliese sat between a bundle in which a tiny baby lay sleeping and two men in uniform who were sitting close together. One of them had his head and shoulder bandaged; his sleeve hung empty. Anneliese looked at his face; a good face she thought. She particularly liked his eyes. At first they had watched her keenly; then had fastened themselves intently on the strange face as if he did not want to let a single thought escape him. His friend was taller and stronger; he watched the passengers more coolly and indifferently, as if he were not too much interested. They talked together excitedly, but in low tones. In the noise and confusion of the compartment they felt almost unobserved. When the noise died down the girl caught only a bit of their conversation. 'All the same, I like the age I've been born in,' said the man with the empty sleeve. 'I like the particular part of the earth on which I was born. There have always been tremendous things going on here from time immemorial. Here we had the two greatest revolutions, the French and the Russian.' He shrugged his left shoulder as if he had forgotten that he could not gesture with that arm any more. The other man said:

'In our part of the world St. Paul journeyed from one land to the other, persecuted by heathens and Jews. He was imprisoned and tortured; he was betrayed by false witnesses and he lay three times at the bottom of the sea.'

The train rattled through the night, heads and luggage banged about pell-mell.

'It was never particularly gay here. People experimented on everything one can experiment on. Only to question everything

again. Here every imaginable thing was built up, then razed to the ground and built up again.' He stopped speaking abruptly because he felt the girl's eyes on him. She promptly huddled up in her corner and closed her eyes, but she listened eagerly at every jolt of the train to every shred of conversation she could catch. Never in her life had she heard talk like this.

'How thin is the skin on brute man! How threadbare the fabric of all they have learned for the last couple of thousand years. And we, we sometimes imagined that it was inborn in them. Now we have to begin again from the beginning. The Ten Commandments: Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not kill. How thin all the things our teachers taught and our writers wrote. How thin all that our pastors preached. It was as thin as skin, yet it did not wear out. When I lay in the field hospital and my arm was cut off someone asked for Extreme Unction. What that fellow had been up to the week before I had seen with my own eyes. He was one of those fellows who, when he was well, managed to forget the boring, burdensome, commandments, all ten of them, as quickly as possible.'

The girl pretended to be asleep. She could hardly catch what the man with the empty sleeve was whispering in his companion's ear. The latter now turned his back to her.

'We never deceived the people, we have always explained to them what was the matter with our age. That we had to go through wars and civil wars just as many generations before us did.'

He waved his good hand in extravagant gestures as he said this, thus delighting the mothers in the compartment because it gave their children something to look at. His friend turned his head and looked over his shoulder: 'We have never tried to persuade anyone either that the world was an enchanting place to live in. Nor have we pretended, as they did, that it can become one world. They have rejected so thoroughly everything that makes a human being human that all of us in whom there is still a tiny spark left belong together. You and I used to argue about how things ought to go on. Now we must first find a point from which they can begin.'

Anneliese wondered whether the fat woman with the basket had reached the point at which a human being first becomes a human being? And the man with the short beard beside Frau von Uhlenhaut – is there a spark in him? And I, where do I belong?

'In Poland there was a peasant who refused to turn over to the authorities a Jew who had leapt stark naked from the death train. He would not do it, because he said he believed in God.'

'In our regiment there were some who refused to fight, though

they did not die for it. Though they were not Christians, they risked their lives like the first Christians. They had not been contaminated, by any lust for power, any mandate, any mortal fears.'

The train rushed wildly round a curve as if the danger were not overhead, but behind. The children tumbled head over heels. An old woman talked about her daughter who had travelled right across Germany from Breslau to Cologne. The night she arrived she had been blown up with her whole family. The people sitting near her listened for a second or two. They admitted that such things happened. The girl could not hear much more of what the two men were saying because they had put their heads together. To thrust her own head between them was impossible for the same reason that most things were impossible. The old woman was now telling about the son of a friend, who had not been wounded throughout the whole war, but was killed in Berlin on leave during an air-raid. The girl tried to catch one phrase after the other from the conversation between the two men.

'The fault begins when you run into things you think you can do nothing about and you find you can do something. You can give the right or the wrong answer. You can defend yourself to the very last, and then your life will be difficult. You can accept what is offered you and obey, then a little of the spoils will come to you; not much, but still something.'

'I wish I could understand what they are talking about,' thought the girl. 'Perhaps they are talking about me too. When do I meet things I can do nothing about and find I can do something?'

'Then you finally end with the same old story. That every one of us, since Adam and Eve ate the famous apple from the famous tree, is aware of the difference between good and evil.'

A couple of passengers began to get restless and gathered their luggage and their children together. The girl wished with all her heart that she could understand more.

The train stopped in D. One of the men fought his way to the compartment door. The one-armed man stretched his neck.

'Don't forget when you come to Stuttgart we're still living on Bismarckplatz.' After that he devoted his full attention to the children. The girl wondered how she could manage to speak to him. She thought up a question, started to speak, and decided against it. The stranger did not pay the slightest attention to her. It had grown dark inside the compartment and out. The passengers pressed close together, shivering. They talked in lower tones of the dead, the wounded and the missing; of air-raids, of the dangers of travelling, of

the purpose of their trips and of their desires. They seemed to talk now in nightmares, now as if awake. The journey was drawing to an end and the girl had not ventured to speak. She had no idea what sort of a question she should ask.

In the morning she accompanied Frau von Uhlenhaut to her hospital. She was still longing to ask the stranger questions. She slept for a few hours on a chair in the sick woman's room. The second day she went into the city. She walked through the strange light streets and thought: 'I don't know anyone here. I am alone. I have got rid of them all now.' Then suddenly she remembered the name of the square this man had called after his friend. She enquired from house to house for a man with one arm who had arrived yesterday. She overcame her shyness. She was too young to know that one often knocks in life, but the door is not always opened. She was therefore not really surprised when, finally, after searching for a long time the man she sought opened the door himself. He did not recognize her, and when the girl had overcome her shyness and told him she had travelled on the same train with him, he was afraid of being annoyed by an unwelcome visit. He looked her up and down. Someone inside the flat called to ask what the matter was. The girl begged him, in embarrassment, for something to eat. At the hospital they had forgotten to offer her anything and she was dizzy from hunger. She waited, longing to be told that she could come in and sit down and eat. Then she would feel better. Perhaps she could even think of a question. For she was not yet far enough advanced to seek the right solution. She was still looking first for the right question. She had not yet known much evil or much good in life, it never occurred to her that one can also seek and not find. The stranger shrugged his shoulders. He looked at her in surprise. Then he invited her in and told his wife to give her something to eat.

VI

In the course of the week the estimate Wenzlow had presented in his report improved. Food was dropped to the troops by plane and there was even a post, which put new life in the men. Wenzlow was now sharing a bunker with Fahrenberg. The dugout was divided in two by boards; with next door one general room for all. Wenzlow was sitting in his bunker reading a letter, when Fahrenberg came in.

'News?'

'Bad,' Wenzlow replied.

Fahrenberg said nothing, but waited. Wenzlow said softly, be-

cause the board walls divided the one large room only in appearance: 'My Tante Amalie is dead.'

Fahrenberg looked at him in surprise. He would have been just as surprised if he had been stranded on the moon and had found one of his comrades there who was depressed because his old aunt on earth had died. He kept silent; he could not manage to show the slightest feeling that somewhere outside in the wide world some person or other had ceased to exist. Then he recalled vaguely that one or two years ago when they happened to be eating alone, Wenzlow had told him about an old lady who had taken the place of his mother to him. How funny that Wenzlow of all men should still cling to the old woman!

In rereading his sister's letter, Wenzlow noticed a sentence that at first in his anguish he had passed over thoughtlessly: 'Stachwitz too is no longer among the living. Perhaps it is just as well that he and our aunt saw each other again. You know how fond Tante was of him. And this particular death would have caused her great sorrow.'

Why did Lenore write like that about the death of their childhood friend? Why did she not simply write: 'Fallen'? Why write 'this' death? Why 'this particular death would have caused her great sorrow'?

After the news of Tante Amalie's death, no other sorrow could begin to touch Wenzlow. For that reason he thought almost indifferently: 'Perhaps he could not keep his mouth shut.' Though of late he had been better at that. Even as a boy Stachwitz had got his fun out of stirring up all sorts of foolish little private rebellions.

There had been tense excitement over the trial that cost many officers their lives because they had attempted to kill Hitler. At the time Wenzlow had talked it over with Fahrenberg. They had agreed on the most important point. When once the enemy put his foot on German soil, then they must all stand united behind the Fuehrer.

But Stachwitz, poor little Stachwitz, he was always getting mixed up in all sorts of enterprises. Once before, in the old days, he had almost stuck his nose into the officers' trial at Ulm. Probably, because he had stuck his nose in so quickly and so noisily, he had been fed up with the whole thing so soon. He would not be able to hold his tongue even on the Judgment Day, poor, noisy little Stachwitz.

On one of the next days it was reported to Wenzlow that three men in one of the companies that had arrived as reinforcements were frequently seen going off by themselves and holding suspicious

conversations. These conversations were promptly broken off when a fourth party joined them. Part of the equipment the company had brought with them in the baggage of the military police was information relating to each individual man. It was ascertained at the time of their arrest that one of the three, a certain Ehrmann, had already been designated by a superior officer as doubtful.

During the past night the Russian attack had broken through the outer lines for the first time. Since then it had bogged down. But it was clear that the Russians would soon attempt a final breakthrough. Then not even the second reinforcements that had just arrived could hold out till the narrow approach was closed. Wenzlow was twice summoned to Brauns that night. He added to his report that, in the last reinforcements to arrive, they had identified a similarly suspicious group. A man detailed immediately on their arrival to watch them had reported that they were planning to facilitate the breakthrough. Brauns found directions unnecessary as Wenzlow had already applied the usual procedure in the case of the group reported.

Wenzlow had scarcely got back to his quarters when he was called over to Brauns a third time. The orderly officer was waiting for him at the entrance to the cellar corridor and accompanied him to the door. Brauns lay on his camp-bed. Wenzlow pulled the door to behind him and standing in front of the door waited for Brauns's hand to motion him to the chair beside the bed. As Brauns did not raise his hand, Wenzlow went over towards him. Brauns had put a bullet through his head. He had chosen the moment when his orderly officer had gone out through the side door to fetch Wenzlow.

Wenzlow had known himself that their situation was hopeless. The enemy had closed up the cauldron. Though the second reinforcements had arrived there was absolutely no chance of breaking through the encirclement from inside. He needed no order from the Fuehrer to fight to the last man. He listened with nausea to Niehls's longwinded explanation of Brauns's end. What right had Niehls to speak of shame and disgrace? He, Wenzlow, and not Niehls, knew what honour was. Brauns would not even have needed to set him an example. There were many other examples, individual men and whole families in the history of the nation. If nothing else was left but destruction, then death was nobler than a corpse-like semblance of life.

This Niehls, however, was afraid of something quite different. For his sort, defeat meant no fiery abyss, but an airy gallows. That was the reason for all his talk: the Fuehrer had forbidden suicide. In the

diary of the Great King there were better precepts than that. He had determined not to live to see a final defeat. In such a suicide, Niehls babbled, lay the fear of a hopeless battle – there was no such thing. He gave examples of unexpected and miraculous rescues. Niehls was incapable of imagining a situation that was hopeless. Wenzlow listened with such disgust to Niehls's banal and bombastic explanations of miracles that, at last, he could not control himself. He jumped up and slammed the door behind him. It did not slam very hard because being the fourth they had put up in their cellar after the bombardments of the last four days, it was only a temporary wooden partition. Wenzlow paced to and fro in the narrow corridor, bumping his head every now and then against the low ceiling.

The sentry in front of Brauns's door had been changed. A man by the name of Kuhlmay stood guard over the dead man. Wenzlow looked at the broad, immobile peasant face. What hope was keeping Kuhlmay alive? Perhaps he too was hoping for a miracle of the sort Niehls babbled about. Like everyone else he knew that the front was crumbling. They were a lost islet of resistance without any hope of a breach in the encirclement. There was only enough ammunition to last till the end of the week. They had no more strength to repulse the Soviet advance even lightly. Perhaps Kuhlmay did not know this as certainly as Wenzlow.

Kuhlmay was thinking similar thoughts about Wenzlow as the officer paced to and fro in the dark corridor. What is still keeping Wenzlow alive? He has followed Brauns through thick and thin; he has always followed his example. Now it seems he doesn't find the example so attractive. He was never one of the worst, only fairly bad. He is probably glad now that he never counted among the bigwigs. He probably has a wife at home he would like to see again.

Wenzlow went back again into the general room: he had himself in hand. Niehls had stopped talking. Though his talk had been fiery and verbose, he was now staring dully before him. As the door closed behind Wenzlow, Kuhlmay thought: 'I'd like to know whether he's going to follow Brauns . . . Hold out to the last man. What does that mean? The man before the last is not going to take time to see what the last man is doing. God willing, I'll be the last man.'

Ten minutes later Kuhlmay again stood at attention before Wenzlow. At that moment Fahrenberg came in through the cellarway. He spoke quickly to Wenzlow. The latter's jawbone twitched. Kuhlmay thought: 'What's happened now?' Fahrenberg ran into the bunker. He came back with two officers. They all began talking at once. 'Who's shot himself now?' thought Kuhlmay. But then he

caught a few words and knew that no one had shot himself. On the contrary – Niehls had skipped out. He had gone out twenty minutes ago, not to an inspection as Kuhlmay had thought. Instead he had managed to get hold of a plane and had taken off in style. Of course something could easily happen to him before he crossed the enemy lines. On the other hand he might get through.

Kuhlmay heard Fahrenberg say in answer to one of Wenzlow's questions:

'I think his father has a store in Bremen.'

'That's right,' thought Kuhlmay, 'he came from my part of the country. If my luck holds I can still buy studs from him someday.'

Wenzlow went up to the table where Brauns had sat that night. Fiedler, Brauns's successor, was sitting in the same chair. Fiedler's face was not rigid like Brauns's: his eyelids kept blinking nervously. The officer who had replaced Niehls had entered two minutes ahead of Wenzlow – a certain Harms. He handed the papers Niehls had left behind to Fiedler. Fiedler signed them and Wenzlow signed the papers that came under his jurisdiction. Among them was the sentence of the six men caught the day before.

Then Wenzlow was once more alone in his bunker. Defeat, he told himself, has different results on men of different calibre. The rabble takes it in its stride and goes over to the enemy. Brauns has not lived to see it. That swine Niehls, who tried to tell us Brauns had not waited – for what? For a miracle? A marvellous miracle, the plane he stole for himself!

Wenzlow had himself driven out to the lines. In the machine-gun posts the men still believed there was ammunition enough for at least eight days. Only a few men knew the truth – that it would give out the day after tomorrow. That was the end. The motor-car bumped over the rough ground and stopped in front of a bomb-hole where, a few hours before, there had been a road. He would probably have time to get there and back before the expected attack. He cursed the delay. They ran into a squad of six men, without guns, without insignia. The convoy guards saluted. Wenzlow called out:

'Where are you taking them anyway? *Macht Schluss!* Liquidate 'em!'

These six men were being led out to be shot. Why all that effort? Why march them past the car round some bombhole or other to some wall? They could one and all be blown up together; the guards, the car, the condemned. The sentence must be carried out quickly: those six men must not simply die. From the car in which he sat Wenzlow cast a glance at the faces. They were bleak: Death

stood at their elbow. Like all the rest of us in this damned cauldron, thought Wenzlow, probably every man jack of us. The thought went through his head – 'Their reprieve is over.' The second man, only a few feet away, moved his lips, called something to him or thought he was calling. One of the soldiers in the convoy jerked him back. The car almost grazed them in passing.

Fifteen minutes later came the long thin whine, then the gurgling, that heralded the new attack. The car came back over the same road. 'Nothing will happen to me,' Wenzlow thought, 'I must do it myself. Brauns did it.'

They passed the place where they had met the six who were being led off somewhere to be shot, unless the guards had liquidated them then and there. He himself had called out: '*Macht Schluss!* Let them have it!' In the whine and gurgle of the shells he heard the sound of his voice: '*Macht Schluss! Macht Schluss!*' – a sound like the echo of the other. When had the first sound rung out? In what mountain hollow? Where? That fellow, the second on the right, had been an old acquaintance too. He had seen him somewhere in his life, but where and when? His impudent face, the way he flung his head back quickly, the sharp, bright glance as if it were important for him to recognize Wenzlow. Then he thought: 'Now I know who you are.'

He could not put the thought out of his mind. It kept pursuing him. The car took two heavy bumps in a rain of mud and stones. Bullets struck close by. The car leapt backward, turned sharply and caught in a shell-hole. The driver, clever and cool, twisted in and out between life and death as if he were driving between ordinary obstacles. Now he turned his flat-nosed face to Wenzlow and said:

'The Herr Major would do better to walk now.'

Wenzlow jumped out of the car. He recognized the stump of the building he was returning to. Now even the stump was split in two. Through the opening one could see flames. The sentry stood on the same spot in front of the outer entrance; the entrance had not been hit, but what there was to guard, was going up in smoke. As Wenzlow rushed towards the opening a soldier came running out past him. Wenzlow jumped over the bomb-hole. Soldiers digging away rubble stepped back out of his way. He skirted two dead men lying crosswise on top of one another, rushed quickly down the steps, ran past the sentry in front of Brauns's door and into his own bunker. The sentry, still the same Kuhlmay, thought: 'there you are, back again. Come, finish yourself off . . . *Macht Schluss!* You don't want to be taken prisoner, so you'll have to do the same as Brauns. You

look as though you're going to. Only you don't look as though you had the guts.'

Waiting in his bunker, which was separated by a board wall from the captain's, Wenzlow found two brother officers who began talking to him excitedly. He did not understand and did not want to understand what they were saying: he sent them both to Fiedler.

Though floor and walls were now heaving and swaying dangerously in the cellar, Wenzlow felt calmer down here. He wanted to be alone for a moment. Kuhlmay noticed that there was no light under Wenzlow's door. He thought: 'Now it's beginning. Of course it isn't easy. Every man has all sorts of hopes.'

Wenzlow took out his revolver and placed it on the table in front of him. He could allow himself a few minutes alone. In the dark, white specks seemed to dance before his eyes, then red and green - colours that glow deep within a man, colours he seeks hungrily all over the world. He had not found them in meadows and woods, nor in the stained-glass windows of churches, not in China; he had found them only in the little oriel window that had been such a joy to him when he went home on holidays. Sometimes he had stolen secretly into the little balcony when the street lights were lighted outside and the oriel window glowed mysteriously. 'What are you doing sitting there in the dark?' Tante Amalie said. She spoke as gruffly as if she herself did not linger often in the balcony. He answered shyly: 'I'll come soon! *Ich werde gleich Schluss machen.*' Angrily she turned her profile, with the prominent nose and sharp chin, to him. 'Will you hurry?'

He shut his eyes because the dazzling colours blinded him. '*Macht Schluss!* Let him have it!' Who had first given him that order? He remembered everything. Now at last it occurred to him where he had once seen that fellow with the impudent face and the yellow crop of hair whom they were taking off to be shot. It was Hauptmann Klemm, his former brother-in-law, now long since dead, who had said '*Macht Schluss!*' Who had been with them at the time? Klemm's chauffeur, flat-nosed like his own chauffeur. And that guard, who was in charge of the prisoner, an honest peasant face. He saw him clearly. And Lieven too, of whom he was jealous because Klemm thought so much of him. Why had Klemm ordered him, Wenzlow, to fire the shot that time instead of his favourite Lieven? They had buried the fellow and covered him with sand. Lieven had laughed at him later when he worried about the discovery of the body. At that time no one had dreamed that he had been reluctant to shoot the man; not even he himself. Such a thought would never have

occurred to him that time when, after their return from France, they fought in the streets of Berlin. As they drove through the Grünewald and the prisoner sat in front of him, he had thought in passing: 'Why, he looks like me! And he is just my age.' Immediately after that they had got out of the car. Then Klemm had given him the signal to shoot.

They had put the man in the ground and covered him up. But how young he had stayed! Probably all of them who had been there had been dead now for a long time. For his own part the burden of life weighed unbearably on him. But that fellow a little while ago, the second from the left, had flung back his head like a young horse. Death seemed not to have touched him. They had ridden roughshod over him, Noske and Lichtschlag, Kapp and Luttwitz. But how young he had stayed! The Nazis had promised him heaven on earth, but he had not let himself be fooled. They had crushed him in every mill till his bones had cracked; they had led him to war, from battle to battle. But he had not let himself be killed: he had stayed young. Even now, when all was lost, he was ready to stake all in one venture again.

The colours glowed under his eyelids. He opened his eyes. He was not sitting in the balcony with the oriel window, but in the dark. He could not even see Tante Amalie's face now. He only heard her stern voice:

'Mach Schluss!'

Kuhlmay heard the shot he had been waiting for. He nodded. Motionless, he listened to the outcries and watched officers running to and fro.

When Marie came home one Saturday she saw a strange woman in her barracks room. The stranger leapt to her feet – it was Emmi, the girl her son loved. Marie's face glowed with joy. The girl clung to her as if she had already realized that this woman, almost a stranger to her, was particularly dear. She had managed, with difficulty, to get away from work long enough to come here and find Marie. It was months since she had had news of Hans. Did Marie know anything? Marie shook her head sadly. It was a long time since she had had any word. She saw, even before the girl told her, that Emmi was expecting a child. Marie nodded. She smiled happily. Emmi was furious.

'What in the world should I be glad about? I can drop my baby in some hole or other like any animal.' Her eyes in her dark little face looked angry and almost black.

'I still keep hoping he will come back,' Marie said.

'I don't even know,' the girl said, 'whether he got the letter telling him that I was expecting a child. Besides, that wouldn't keep him alive.'

'No,' said Marie. 'Not that.' She thought that this girl was wiser and angrier than she herself had been. She had once been so stupid that she had thought the man must come any moment just because she was expecting his child. This girl, however, certainly loved Hans as much as she Marie had loved his father.

Frau Hubner came home from work. They made tea and drank it. That night Frau Hubner lay on the outside edge of the bed so that Emmi could lie against the wall and Marie in the middle.

They were wakened by an air-raid alarm. Emmi's face was already so hard and cold that it did not change. When the bombs began dropping near, people shrieked and the house swayed, but Emmi was still numb and unmoved. Two hours later Marie and Emmi lay down together again. Frau Hubner had crept in with Frau Klaeber's children because the youngest was crying. The old man began to snore again. As if they had an audience, the soldier soon began to curse and Frau Klaeber to launch forth into comforting speeches. Marie noticed that the girl's eyes were wide open and realized that she could not sleep. She lay propped on one arm. Outside on the street there was still the sound of people walking, of commands being shouted and cars rushing by.

Emmi said: 'I've had enough of the whole business. I don't want to go on living.'

'Perhaps by the time you have your child,' said Marie, 'it will be all over.'

'And what then? What of it? Yes, if that would mean he was sure to come back. The Russians can't bring your Hans's bones back in their knapsacks. If he really doesn't come back to me, it would be better for the child not to be born. At first I always hoped Hans would come back. I imagined my letter would get to him and then he would come!'

'Just as it was with me,' thought Marie. 'At first I used to think he only needed to know about it and he would come back to me.'

The girl went on bitterly and solemnly: 'We belonged to each other like no other two people in the world. I loved him - I can't tell you how much I love him. We lay in each other's arms. We thought the same thoughts.'

'It can't all be over just like that. You yourself don't even know that it is.' Marie went on talking quietly a little while longer, then

she noticed that the girl had fallen asleep. She had taken her arm from under her head. Now that the sombre eyes were closed at last, she looked at peace. Marie touched her hair tenderly. Then she herself slept.

Little by little the others in the room settled down. Marie and Emmi face to face, breathing quietly throughout the last hours of the night. And between them was the child that had not yet seen the light of the world.

THE END



